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WORKING PAPERS IN

Early Childhood Development

55

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Challenges for early childhood and primary education in Ethiopia, India and Peru

By Martin Woodhead, Patricia Ames,  
Uma Vennam, Workneh Abebe  
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STUDIES IN  
Early Childhood  
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November 2009

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## Executive summary

The potential of quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) to transform young lives is increasingly recognised. Accounts of innovative and effective programmes have been disseminated widely and endorsed by scientific evidence as well as economic and human rights arguments. Reports about model programmes and the high returns on ECCE investments provide crucial leverage in advocating for policy change and programme development. They are also a source of inspiration to all who work with children and families. But they tell only part of the story. The focus of this paper is on the many challenges that lie ahead in making sure the potential of ECCE is being translated into practice, through improvements in the everyday lives of young children and families. Our starting point is what might be described as 'the everyday ordinariness' of most ECCE

programmes. We ask which children do and which do not have access to an early childhood programme? We explore children's and parents' views about the quality of what is on offer, as these inform the choices they make, and their transition into the early grades of primary school. We explore these questions in rural and urban communities in majority world contexts that don't commonly feature in early childhood research and publications.

The working paper is based on interviews and observations carried out as part of *Young Lives*, a 15-year longitudinal study of children growing up in poverty in diverse contexts. Our research for this paper has focused on 6,000 children in three of the countries in the study, Ethiopia, India and Peru. These children were all around 6 years old in 2006/7, a key transition



point for starting school. Studying experiences and perspectives of *Young Lives* parents and children makes it possible to examine to what extent promises made for early childhood are being translated into practice, in terms of accessible, equitable, quality programmes.

ECCE programmes play an increasing role in the lives of the world's children. 87% of the *Young Lives* sample of children in Andhra Pradesh were reported as having attended pre-school at some point since their third birthday, and 84% in Peru. It is only in Ethiopia that pre-school is a minority experience (just 25% of the sample). But while programmes and services are growing in numbers, the quality of these programmes and equity of access is far less certain. Taking all types of provision together, children from the poorest circumstances are under-represented in terms of attendance levels, while the more advantaged are over-represented. Equity appears closest to being achieved in Andhra Pradesh, with less than 10% difference in access levels between the 'poorest' and the 'least poor' households in the sample.

However, these overall statistics disguise significant differences in the type and quality of programmes available to children according to their circumstances, with a growing private sector as well as a strong rural–urban divide. Data from Peru show government programmes are the main provision, but overall ECCE is accessed by 25% fewer of the 'poorest' households, mainly due to the availability of the private sector to urban 'least poor' families. Pre-school in Ethiopia is almost entirely private, urban, and accessed by relatively advantaged families, with

58% of urban *Young Lives* children attending pre-school, but only 4% of rural children.

Another way to look at these differentials is in relation to parent education levels. Thus, amongst the Peru sample, virtually all children with highly educated mothers (more than 10 years of school) have attended pre-school, whereas over 30% of children whose mothers have low levels of education (0 to 4 years) will have begun first grade without any experience of a pre-school programme. These trends risk perpetuating intergenerational poverty and inequalities and are the very opposite of internationally agreed policy priorities. Once the overall statistics are disaggregated, other inequalities in early opportunities are revealed, notably between children in rural versus urban poverty, and between government versus private education.

Later chapters offer detailed analyses on these issues for Ethiopia, then Peru and finally Andhra Pradesh. Evidence on access to services is linked to parental aspirations for children as well as their perceptions of the quality of services available to their children. These later chapters also report parents' and children's personal accounts of pre-school and transitions to primary school, based on evidence from *Young Lives*' qualitative research in four or five communities in each country. These case studies highlight diversity in early education opportunities, in perspectives on early learning, and in future prospects. What these communities share in common is the significance attached to education by families and children at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a potential route out of poverty towards personal

achievement and greater family prosperity. Amongst many rural families, education is seen as a potential escape from the hardship of living and labouring in rural economies. Aspirations for children's education (and children's own educational aspirations) are linked to poverty levels, but even the poorest households recognise the power of education to transform their children's lives. The discrepancy between parental aspirations and children's realistic prospects in the context of current weaknesses within the education systems is very striking.

Several general conclusions are offered from *Young Lives* research:

#### ***Ensuring quality in early education***

Early childhood programmes are playing a major (and increasing) role in young children's lives, even in countries where primary education systems are still being consolidated. But early education services are often of very variable quality, as are the school classrooms to which children progress. Identifying cost-effective and sustainable ways to improve quality in early childhood and primary classes is a high priority.

#### ***Better coordinated pre-school and school systems***

Even in countries with well developed early education services, transition experiences into first grade are frequently stressful for children and parents because of a lack of communication and coordination between two sectors that are governed by different management structures, organisation and financing, professional training, curricula and pedagogy.

Ensuring effective coordination of transitions between pre-school and primary classes has been a major ECCE theme amongst the world's richest countries over many decades. Addressing these issues is now a global challenge.

#### ***Focusing on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children***

Current arrangements for early childhood care and education appear in many cases to run counter to the requirements for implementing the rights of every child, and are equally incompatible with achieving social equity. While some government services in the countries studied are explicitly intended to be pro-poor, all too often they do not function effectively to achieve that goal in practice. At the same time, the impact of a growing private sector is to reinforce rather than reduce inequities of access to quality education. In order to reverse these trends, governments along with international donors and other agencies have a central role to play.

#### ***More effective governance, including governance of the private sector***

The three countries in this report offer contrasting experiences on the impact of the private sector. In Ethiopia, private pre-schools have to some extent filled an ECCE vacuum, but for the most part they benefit only the most advantaged urban groups. Both Peru and Andhra Pradesh have well-established government systems, but there is also a significant private pre-school and primary sector. The situation in urban Andhra Pradesh is extreme, with largely unregulated private providers dominating

and displacing traditional *anganwadis* as the pre-school of choice for parents. While many individual children benefit, quality is highly variable, and inequities are amplified.

### ***Addressing the full range of equity issues***

All too often early education opportunities combine with parental choices to reinforce ethnic, caste or class divisions. Inequities within households have also been identified, where families make choices about which child to educate privately, which to send to a government school, which to withdraw early, and so on. Unregulated ECCE can amplify rather than reduce inequalities. The poorest families are at an inevitable disadvantage over better-off parents, and these disadvantages are often compounded by differences in quality between poor schools and rich schools, especially in the private sector.

These conclusions may seem depressing, but they should not be interpreted as a counsel of despair, nor do they undermine the case for investment in early childhood services in these countries or elsewhere. On the contrary, they should be seen as challenges to re-double efforts to strengthen the provision of high quality early childhood programmes and ensure all children make successful transitions into primary education. The goal should be to match the ambitious claims being made about the potential of ECCE with policies and programmes that have capacity to deliver on those claims, especially for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young children.

As a starting point for meeting these challenges, The United Nations Committee on the Rights

of the Child, in General Comment 7 (UN Committee, 2005), has called on governments (and others) to develop ‘a positive agenda for early childhood’. In part, this positive agenda is about respect for the youngest members of society “...as active members of families, communities and societies, with their own concerns, interests and points of view” (UN Committee, 2005, Para 5). Implementing this positive agenda also requires a review of services for young children and families. The Committee noted that early childhood services have often been fragmented, the responsibility of several government departments at central and local levels, and planned in piecemeal fashion, where they have been planned at all. In addition, it noted that the private and voluntary sector often played a significant role without adequate resources, regulation or quality assurance.

The challenges for ECCE include building a positive equity agenda, setting clear policy objectives, raising quality standards, building the skills and motivation of teachers and recognising where equity goals can be incompatible with a market-led private system. In short, realising the benefits promised for early childhood, achieving equity and implementing children’s rights requires strong policy engagement, strategic planning and investment, especially if early childhood services are to avoid amplifying inequalities already established early in so many children’s lives.

Later working papers in this series on early transitions will examine these issues in greater detail for specific *Young Lives* countries.

## Introduction

Early childhood is now more under the global spotlight than ever before. Numerous lines of research have converged to produce a compelling case for prioritising policy and service development in this area. Research demonstrates that the earliest years of a child's life represent a crucial period of biological, neurological, psychological, social and emotional growth and change; that poverty and other disadvantages can affect a child's 'developmental potential' in numerous (and in some respects irreversible) ways; and that well-planned early interventions can have long-term positive outcomes for children. Economic analyses have reinforced research findings to support the compelling claim that access to quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) isn't just good for children's development and consistent with realising their rights; it is also an important pro-poor strategy capable of increasing equity. In addition, it is often highly cost effective, with some well-designed programmes calculating high rates of return from early 'investment in human capital'; in some cases many times higher than the initial investment. Underlying these persuasive lines of research and analysis is the foundation principle on which all initiatives should be built: that young children have a right to development and education without discrimination (for an overview, see Siraj-Blatchford and Woodhead 2009).

Numerous examples could be cited of well-established ECCE systems, especially in some of the world's richest countries, of model

programmes being pioneered in developing country contexts, and of the rapid growth in ECCE services worldwide (OECD 2001, 2006; UNESCO 2006). The growth in examples of high quality programmes provides crucial leverage in advocating for policy change as well as being a source of inspiration to all who work with children and families. But these success stories tell only part of the global early childhood story.

**Beniam** lives in a village in rural Ethiopia and he is 6 years old. He is already used to taking on a variety of responsibilities, at home with the cattle and in the fields. This has been Beniam's early education. When he is around 7 years, he expects to begin first grade at the local primary school, which is a simple mud and timber construction where children sit on logs or on the dirt floor. Classes are often overcrowded and there are few books or educational resources. Beniam's father thinks formal schooling will be "*useful for the child*", especially in a context where agricultural work is not as promising as in the past. Beniam isn't so sure. Asked what he wants to do in the future, he replies, "*become a shepherd...looking after the cattle*".

**Dilshad** lives in a Muslim community in Hyderabad, the state capital of Andhra Pradesh, India. She is the youngest of nine children from one of the poorest families in the community. Her father is a rickshaw

puller and her mother works as a servant. Neither of Dilshad's parents benefited much from school, but they are keen to do the best they can for their youngest child's education. Dilshad was briefly enrolled in government primary school, but her parents were not happy with the quality of the teaching. So they followed the growing trend, even amongst the poorest parents in India, enrolling Dilshad in a small, local private school. They hope she will complete tenth class, but they are aware they are breaking with tradition: *"She will continue her studies; if she is studying properly then why should we get her married?"*

**Lupe** is growing up in one of the oldest shanty-towns in Lima, the capital city of Peru. Basic services are available to Lupe and her family, including water and electricity, schools, hospitals and public transportation. Lupe attended a government pre-school from the age of 2 years and by the time she was 6 had transferred to primary school. Making the transition wasn't so easy for Lupe, and her mother worries that the school environment and the primary teachers' attitudes are less child-centred: *"...it's completely different... in pre-school they also take care of her...Here the teacher stays in the classroom...[Lupe] could tumble and fall, she might be pushed and hit...so many things can happen during the break time"*.

Beniam, Dilshad and Lupe<sup>1</sup> are just three of the 12,000 children participating in *Young Lives*, a 15-year longitudinal study of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India (in the State of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam. The overall goal of *Young Lives* is to generate evidence on the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and inequality in order to shape policy debate and programme design in the study countries. *Young Lives'* work is unique because the programme integrates periodic questionnaire-based surveys of all children and their caregivers with more in-depth research using a range of qualitative methods.

This paper is focused on 6,000 of the youngest children participating in *Young Lives* research in Ethiopia, India and Peru. Each child's parents or other caregivers were interviewed during 2006/7, at a time when these children were all around 6 years old. Very large numbers had experienced some kind of ECCE and most were at the point of transition to primary school. A smaller sub-sample of around 25 children in each country was also selected for in-depth study about their experiences of going to pre-school and school, which are set alongside the perspectives of parents, teachers and others.

This working paper is one of a series on 'early transitions' from *Young Lives*. The aim of the paper is to provide an overview of initial *Young Lives* evidence by exploring the ECCE

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<sup>1</sup> All children's names and local place names have been changed to protect anonymity.

programmes available to children in each of the three countries. The paper reports evidence on which children do and which do not have access to the programmes; highlights their experiences in the transition from home, through pre-school to the early grades of primary schooling; and analyses the choices made by their caregivers. Their stories continue to be followed by *Young Lives* researchers as they progress (or fail to progress) through the early grades of primary education.

Often, the lack of early childhood services or the problems associated with low-quality education are not perceived as a policy issue until they become visible in the form of low achievement, grade repetition, drop-out rates, or disaffection and anti-social behaviour. However, *Young Lives* data confirms that inequality begins in the very earliest years, reflected in the availability and quality of ECCE services as well as primary education, in the choices that families make, and in children's overall socio-economic environment. By making our starting

point the lives of children and families, rather than the organisation of programmes, we aim to highlight the diverse (and unequal) pathways that become significant very early in children's lives. Understanding children's and parents' perspectives and experiences is an important starting point for policy, if governments are to ensure that every child's right to development and education is respected, and that they are enabled to achieve their full potential.

This paper follows on from a conceptual analysis and literature review already published by the Bernard van Leer Foundation (Vogler et al. 2008). Future working papers in this early transitions series will examine the policy context for early education in individual *Young Lives* countries and provide insight into the meaning of early childhood transitions from national, cultural and educational perspectives. Additional *Young Lives* reports on early childhood transitions are available at [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)



## Chapter 1: Education and early childhood: promises and realities

### Does 'education for all' include early education?

The policy starting point is that universal education is a fundamental human right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989). It is also one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set out in 2000, and a key development strategy for modern societies. The goal of Education for All (EFA) was established by the World Declaration (UNESCO 1990) and in the targets set out in the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO 2000). Much progress has been made towards achieving the goal of universal primary education, but the limitation of focusing on school enrolment is recognised widely, unless this is linked to ensuring quality and positive educational outcomes (Hanushek and Wößmann 2007; UNESCO 2007, 2008). Global primary school enrolment rose by 6.4% between 1999 and 2005 (from 647 million to 688 million), with particularly strong increases in sub-Saharan Africa (by 29 million or 36%) and South and West Asia (by 35 million or 22%) (UNESCO 2007). Even so, primary education provision is still marked by inequalities and there are serious shortages in resources for buildings, teachers and materials. These inequalities are widespread within and between countries. As a general rule, the poorest and most vulnerable children and families are least likely to have access to quality education.

Other major barriers to children's progress in education include gender, birth order, parental educational background, location and ethnicity (UNESCO 2008). In short, multiple factors shape educational outcomes and, in far too many countries, school systems appear to amplify rather than combat inequalities. For example, data for sub-Saharan Africa shows that children from the richest 20% of households are 11 times more likely to reach grade 9 than those from the poorest 40% (Lewin 2007a). The challenge is to make sure that schools are ready for children (in terms of access, equity and quality), as well as ensuring the children are ready for school (in terms of adequate nutrition, family support and early learning) (Arnold et al. 2007; Woodhead and Moss 2007; UNESCO 2008).

In addressing this challenge, policy debates have increasingly been drawn to the question of whether starting school at 5, 6 or 7 years of age is already too late as a pro-poor strategy. By the time most children are enrolled in school, their most formative years are already behind them, there has been a huge 'loss in developmental potential' in far too many cases, and poverty-linked ability gaps are already well established (Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007). Recognising the potential significance of early learning, inability to access pre-school education has been identified as the first 'Zone of Exclusion' (Lewin 2007a).



It is important to note that the Dakar Framework for Action (for EFA) prioritised early childhood as Goal 1:

“...Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.”

(UNESCO 2000)

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has also reasserted the importance of early childhood. The UN Committee is elected by countries that have ratified the UNCRC, and has responsibility for monitoring progress towards implementation. Concerned about the relative neglect of the earliest years of childhood in reports received from governments, The UN Committee offered guidance in its General Comment 7 on ‘Implementing child rights in early childhood’ (UN Committee 2005; see also UN Committee/UNICEF/Bernard van Leer Foundation 2006).

In one section of General Comment 7, the UN Committee elaborates on UNCRC Article 28 by interpreting every child’s right to education as beginning at birth and being tied closely to the right to development (as set out in Article 6.2 of the UNCRC). The Committee goes beyond a narrow interpretation of ‘education’ as ‘schooling’. Instead, General Comment 7 offers a vision for comprehensive, community services throughout early and middle childhood, both for children and for parents as their educators and caregivers. This vision acknowledges that family and home settings offer the foundation (and

for most children the underlying continuity) on which progression through early childhood and primary education is constructed.

Through its General Comment 7, the Committee has called on governments (and others) to develop ‘a positive agenda for early childhood’. In part this positive agenda is about respect for the youngest members of society “...as active members of families, communities and societies, with their own concerns, interests and points of view” (UN Committee 2005, Para 5). Implementing this positive agenda also requires a review of services for young children and families. The Committee noted that early childhood services are often fragmented. They are often the responsibility of several government departments at central and local levels, and are planned in piecemeal fashion, if planned at all. In addition, the private and voluntary sectors often play a significant role, without adequate resources, regulation or quality assurance. For this reason, the Committee urged States parties to:

“...develop rights-based, coordinated, multi-sectoral strategies in order to ensure that children’s best interests are always the starting point for service planning and provision. These should be based around a systematic and integrated approach to law and policy development in relation to all children up to 8 years old. A comprehensive framework for early childhood services, provisions and facilities is required, backed up by information and monitoring systems...”

(UN Committee 2005, General Comment 7, para 22)

These policy developments have been taking place against a background of accumulating scientific research, which demonstrates convincingly the potential of early childhood programmes to improve outcomes for young children, especially for disadvantaged groups (e.g. reviews by Penn 2004; AERA 2005; Engle et al. 2007; Siraj-Blatchford and Woodhead 2009). Evidence on long-term benefits of early intervention combines with estimates about the 'loss in developmental potential', (Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007) and insights from developmental neuroscience (e.g. Shonkoff and Phillips 2000) to produce a compelling scientific case for investment in quality early childhood programmes. The scientific case has also been endorsed by leading development economists (van der Gaag 2002; Heckman 2006). Research evidence is translated into claims about the cost effectiveness of early intervention, which is communicated to governments, donors and others worldwide. For example:

"A healthy cognitive and emotional development in the early years translates into tangible economic returns. Early interventions yield higher returns as a preventive measure compared with remedial services later in life. Policies that seek to remedy deficits incurred in the early years are much more costly than initial investments in the early years."

(Source: <http://web.worldbank.org>; see also Young and Richardson 2007)

Research and policy attention on early years coincides with a massive expansion of services. Initially, ECCE was prioritised mainly by countries with a long history of

universal primary education, although with marked variety in extent, infrastructure and organisation amongst other things (OECD 2001, 2006). Since the 1990s, ECCE has also become established within the education systems of developing economies. Overall, UNESCO (2006) estimated a 300% global increase in enrolment in pre-primary education since 1970.

Even though significant progress has been made in expanding ECCE (UNESCO 2006), it is far less certain how far promises made for ECCE as a cost-effective anti-poverty strategy are being realised, especially in respect of the important emphasis in Dakar Goal 1 on expanding and improving comprehensive ECCE "...especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children" (UNESCO 2000). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child echoed the Dakar goals in the emphasis it placed on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in its General Comment 7. Calling on States parties to ensure that all young children are guaranteed access to appropriate and effective services, including programmes of health, care and education, the Committee emphasised:

"Particular attention should be paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children and to those who are at risk of discrimination (art. 2). This includes girls, children living in poverty, children with disabilities, children belonging to indigenous or minority groups, children from migrant families, children who are orphaned or lack parental care for other reasons, children living in institutions, children living with mothers in prison, refugee and asylum-seeking children, children

infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS, and children of alcohol or drug-addicted parents.”  
(UN Committee 2005, General Comment 7, para 24).

The gulf between the promises made for what can be achieved through ECCE and current realities for children and communities has recently been highlighted in the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009, which concludes:

“While coverage rates are increasing worldwide, early childhood services of good quality remain inaccessible to the majority of the world’s children. This is especially true for children in the poorest countries – and for the most disadvantaged among them. The upshot is a perverse outcome for equity: those with the most to gain from ECCE are least likely to participate.”

(UNESCO 2008, p. 42)

This working paper elaborates on the challenges of reaching the most disadvantaged and ensuring equity and quality. It focuses on three linked sets of issues:

1. **Access, quality and equity:** Multiple factors have triggered growth in ECCE worldwide. While recent decades have witnessed extensive policy, programme and practice development for early childhood, current patterns of services have not always been driven by positive educational policies, nor funded as public programmes, nor necessarily targeted towards disadvantaged groups. Acknowledging these complexities, which in many cases can be attributed to weaknesses in governance (UNESCO 2008), is the starting point for asking which groups of children and families are most likely to access different types of ECCE, as well as the perceived quality of these services.
2. **Relationship between early childhood and primary education:** Children are typically faced with multiple transitions as they progress from home via childcare centres, pre-schools, and/or kindergartens into the early grades or classes of primary school (Fabian and Dunlop 2006; Woodhead and Moss 2007). Acknowledging the potential significance of early education for primary schools, this working paper offers evidence on how early education and the transition to primary schools is experienced from the perspective of children, their parents, other caregivers and teachers, supplemented by observational evidence from schools themselves.
3. **Multiple pathways through early childhood and primary education:** Caregivers and children are increasingly confronted with choices in early childhood and primary education, especially in urban areas where a variety of pre-school and primary schools may be available, including public (government) and private provision. For most caregivers in resource-poor communities such ‘choices’ may be more apparent than real, due to the high costs involved in using private schools. Where they are genuinely able to make choices, they are likely to do so in order to give their children what they see as a head start on a particular educational trajectory, which may or may not be consistent with official policies for achieving EFA

goals. These multiple pathways draw attention to the diversities and inequities embedded in early childhood as well as primary education.

While these specific questions shape the organisation of the paper, our aim is to raise more fundamental questions about the growing role of ECCE services in children's lives, and how far these services are currently fulfilling their promise of providing quality experiences that enhance development and improve learning outcomes for young children, especially disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

One important caveat applies to all that follows. We acknowledge that millions of children and families benefit worldwide through participating in high-quality, well-proven early childhood programmes run by dedicated and skilled professionals. However, the goal of this paper is not to highlight well-documented success stories, which in global terms benefit a minority of children, but rather to focus on the daily realities of the unexceptional early childhood and school settings that most children attend, if they attend at all. The paper is about the overall implementation of EFA goals, including in the early years, especially the challenges of reaching the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

The paper is premised on rights-based, evidence-based and economic arguments that point to the early years as a crucial life phase for government investment. The main policy challenge now is to evaluate how far current programmes and institutions are delivering on

this promise for early education, and what can be done to improve those programmes for all children. The paper raises questions about the adequacy of the institutional organisation of both early childhood and primary education in shaping transition experiences for millions of children and families. We ask about the impact of parents' aspirations and decision-making for early educational experiences and later outcomes, and about the role of governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector. Underlying each of these questions is a more fundamental concern. To what extent are children's best interests – and the promise of long term benefits – being served by spending their childhood years within often poorly resourced, overcrowded early childhood and primary classrooms? And what are the future prospects for ensuring successful educational transitions and equitable outcomes for all children?

### **Studying early transitions in *Young Lives***

The issues explored in this paper are part of a wider programme of research, namely the 'Early Transitions' component of *Young Lives*. The aim is to link macro-policy questions around access, equity and quality to the day-to-day experience of children and families being studied as part of *Young Lives* longitudinal research, as they access (or fail to access) quality ECCE services, and as they start in primary school and later on as they progress (or drop out). Transition is a key concept linking institutional factors with individual experiences. Transitions are under-

stood as “key events and/or processes occurring at specific periods or turning points during the life course” (Vogler et al. 2008). These transitions often involve a range of psychosocial and cultural adjustments along with cognitive, social and emotional dimensions. Increasingly, children’s early transitions are shaped not only by maturational, family or community defined milestones, but are defined by laws and policies, by educational institutions and by professional practices (UNESCO 2006; Arnold et al. 2007).

The theme of transitions acknowledges that poverty impacts strongly on life choices, especially in relation to schooling and economic activity, with long-term outcomes for children’s well-being. It also offers an integrative conceptual framework for the study of change in children’s lives from a multi-disciplinary perspective, accommodating psychological, sociological and anthropological perspectives (Vogler et al. 2008). In this regard, transitions research has the potential to unravel the various factors (political, economic, cultural and psychosocial) that interact in shaping children’s access to quality basic services, and explain why some children have more opportunities for development than others in general, and in the context of poverty in particular.

*Young Lives* has unique potential to address these issues at both macro and micro levels, due to its ambitious longitudinal design and its combination of large-scale survey with in-depth qualitative case studies in specific sites and communities. This working paper explores use of early childhood services, as well as transition

to the first grades of schooling. The paper draws on *Young Lives* longitudinal survey data with the full sample of children and families, and on in-depth qualitative data with a subsample of children in Ethiopia, India and Peru.

## Longitudinal large sample surveys

*Young Lives* is tracking two cohorts of children, spanning infancy through to adulthood: an older cohort of 4,000 children born in 1994, and a younger cohort of 8,000 children born in 2000/1. The first round of *Young Lives* survey research was carried out in 2002 and the second round in 2006/7. Subsequent rounds of data collection are planned in 2009, 2012 and 2015. This working paper draws mainly on household interviews carried out in Round 2 (2006/7).

The interviews provide extensive information on the development and experiences of the 2000 younger cohort children in each country who were around 5 or 6 years old at the time their caregivers were interviewed. Besides collecting extensive information about household circumstances and livelihoods, specific questions were asked about the use of early childhood services, decision making around school attendance, and parental expectations and attitudes towards transition to school. Caregivers’ views on the quality of pre-school services were also sought, along with expectations of school attendance, children’s development and future prospects. These surveys also included basic anthropometric data for each child (height and weight, etc.) and child psychometric test data relevant to successful school transitions, including assessing children’s receptive vocabulary and their

understanding of quantitative concepts (Escobal et al. 2008; Galab et al. 2008; Woldehanna et al. 2008). Additional data is also available from a smaller cohort of older children, who were born in 1994/5 and were around 12 years old at Round 2. (Further details on the areas covered by the surveys are provided in the Appendix).

Survey data in this paper are used to answer key questions about access to early education services and how far access is associated with poverty, geographical location, gender and other variables. The longitudinal design of *Young Lives* also makes possible the analysis of changing circumstances affecting children and households at key moments in their lives, starting when they were around 1 year old (Round 1) followed up at around 5 years old (Round 2), again at 8 years old (2009 Round 3 data collection) and so on through to 2015. In this way, the research has potential to highlight long-term links between early poverty indicators and later outcomes, children's pathways through diverse childhoods, and the implications for policy.

The conclusions of *Young Lives*' research are based on a relatively large and diverse sample of children, making it possible to analyse relationships amongst poverty and other variables, including access to services. For the longitudinal quantitative surveys, the children were selected from 20 sentinel sites in each country. The concept of a sentinel site comes from health surveillance studies and is a form of purposeful sampling where the site (or cluster in sampling language) is deemed to represent a certain type of population or area, and is

expected to show trends affecting those particular people or areas. In line with the *Young Lives* focus on childhood poverty, poor rural and urban sites were over-sampled in the selection of the research sites. However, even if the poor have been over-sampled, the *Young Lives* data covers the diversity of the children in each study country in a wide variety of attributes and experiences (Escobal and Flores 2008; Kumra 2008; Outes-Leon and Sanchez 2008).

### Longitudinal qualitative case studies

Qualitative research is a more recent feature of *Young Lives*, with the first data collection in 2007, approximately 6 months after survey Round 2. Qualitative research teams in each country have been working with a sub-sample of *Young Lives* children (approximately 25 older cohort and 25 younger cohort children per country) in selected *Young Lives* sites (five sites in Ethiopia and four sites in the other three countries). A variety of qualitative and participatory methods (see Appendix) have been used to understand the diverse aspirations and experiences of children from different geographical, socio-economic and cultural locations (Johnston 2008; Crivello et al. 2008).

Three core questions guide the qualitative research. These are sensitive to differences between children (e.g. age, gender, socio-economic status, ethnic, linguistic or religious identity) and inter-generational differences (e.g. in the perspectives of children and their caregivers). These questions are:

1. What are the key transitions in children's lives, how are they experienced (particularly in relation to activities, relationships, identities and wellbeing) and what influences these experiences?
2. How is children's wellbeing understood and evaluated by children, caregivers and other stakeholders? What shapes these different understandings, and what causes them to change?
3. How do policies, programmes and services shape children's transitions and wellbeing? What are the different stakeholder perspectives on these processes? What is the interplay between public, private and not-for-profit sectors and communities within these processes?

This paper draws on a small number of early transitions case studies from the first round of qualitative fieldwork carried out in 2007. The case studies have been selected to illustrate common patterns of early transitions, as well as significant within-country diversities shaped by economic, familial, institutional and other factors. Each of the case study children was at a key transition point in 2007, having just

begun, or preparing to begin, first grade of primary school. In many cases, the children were still attending or had recently transferred from a pre-school programme, with patterns of attendance and transition timing varying between countries.

A second round of fieldwork with the same communities, families and children was completed in late 2008 and will be reported in later working papers. In-depth follow-up with this sub-sample of children is also planned to parallel longitudinal survey rounds with the full sample through to 2015, with the prospect of providing detailed evidence on diverse transition pathways for children growing up in changing economies.

The sample for qualitative in-depth research was selected from within a sub-set of the *Young Lives* sentinel sites to offer clear contrasts in terms of poverty levels, rural–urban livelihoods, ethnicity, etc. In selecting case study children within each community, attempts were made to reflect local diversity, including ethnicity, religion, family situation and school attendance (Ames et al. 2008; Tafere and Abebe 2008; Vennam and Komanduri 2008).



## Chapter 2: Early childhood and primary education in Ethiopia

### Policy context

Ethiopia was identified in the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 as among the countries that are making the most rapid progress towards the Dakar goals of universal enrolment and gender parity at the primary level. For example, the net enrolment ratio in primary education increased from 33 to 68% between 1999 and 2005 (UNESCO 2007). A broader-based indicator of progress is provided by the EFA Development Index (EDI), which incorporates net enrolment ratio in primary education (as above) and includes three additional indicators: adult literacy, gender and education quality. In this regard, progress was substantial and the EDI increased by more than 10% between 1999 and 2006. However, despite these efforts, Ethiopia's EDI is still low, ranking 125 out of 129 countries (UNESCO 2008).

Ethiopia has been working towards achieving EFA goals through a number of policy initiatives. For example in 1994, an Education Training Policy (ETP) and Education Sector Strategy were introduced (Government of Ethiopia 1994; Ministry of Education 1996), and since 1997, the Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP), which is part of the government's broader Poverty Reduction Strategy framework, has paid particular attention to reducing inequalities in public education. In 2006, *Young Lives* analysed public expenditure

patterns within the education sector and concluded that the ESDP was pro-poor, pro-rural, and had significantly narrowed the gender gap at the primary school level (Woldehanna and Jones 2006). In 2005/6 a third ESDP set targets and strategies for a 5-year period (Ministry of Education 2005), aiming to address the challenges of access, equity, quality and relevance in education, with an emphasis on primary education in rural and economically disadvantaged areas (Lasonen et al. 2005). Specifically, the Ethiopian government has agreed, amongst other things, to commit itself to:

- increase access to educational opportunities at primary level, to achieve universal primary education by 2015;
- improve the quality of education;
- address equity issues by narrowing the gap in several respects: between boys and girls, between regions, and between rural and urban areas.

These educational reforms have involved a formal restructuring of the school system. Pre-school education is recognised as catering for children aged 4–6 years, but it is not compulsory. Primary education covers the age group 7–14 years and is divided into a first cycle (Grades 1–4) and a second cycle (Grades 5–8). The main goal of the first cycle is functional literacy, while the second cycle is intended to prepare students for two years of general secondary education (Grades 9



and 10), followed by two years of upper secondary education (Grades 11 and 12).

In 1994, Ethiopia adopted automatic grade promotion policies for Grades 1–4, which caused a rapid increase in net enrolment rates (UNESCO 2007). Despite these achievements, many reforms are needed before quality education can be assured for all children. The limitations of current schools are well known and include poor infrastructure and a shortage of facilities, books, other materials and qualified teachers. One of the biggest challenges in primary education is overcrowded schools. Between 1999 and 2005 the pupil-to-teacher ratio in primary education increased by more than 12% (from 1:64 to 1:72 students). This calculation, however, is based on official enrolment figures, and the numbers of children attending class on any one day is often much lower, although when teachers are absent it can be very much higher (UNESCO 2007).

Educational access has increased for the *Young Lives* sample during the life of the project. Enrolment rates for the older cohort increased from 66% in 2002, when the children were 8 years old, to 94% in 2006 when they were 12 years old (although this increase may be due partly to late enrolment rather than increased availability of school opportunities). *Young Lives* data also highlights the fact that enrolment in Ethiopian primary schools is not in itself any guarantee of educational achievement. While only 6% of 12-year-olds were missing from the school roll, 39% were unable to read a simple sentence (e.g. ‘The sun is hot’) in the language used at school.

Inequities are also evident within other *Young Lives* data, with the number of years of completed schooling (by 12 years old) linked closely to levels of wealth, and to the region where the children live (Woldehanna et al. 2008). Indeed, as the education system in Ethiopia is expanding, geographic disparities seem to be increasing, a trend confirmed by EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 (UNESCO 2007), despite the ESDP policy to reduce those disparities.

Although the government of Ethiopia formally recognises pre-school education as a sector catering for children aged 4–6 years, the development of public pre-primary services has been minimal. Ethiopia is the only *Young Lives* country with no official programme targeting children under the age of 3 years (UNESCO 2008). While regrettable, the weaknesses of early childhood service development are not surprising while primary education is still being consolidated in Ethiopia. A number of pre-schools have been established in recent years, mainly in urban areas and through NGOs, private individuals and religious institutions (Hoot et al. 2004). According to recent national statistics, 95% of children aged 3–5 years who are attending pre-school are doing so in a private facility (UNESCO 2008). Inevitably, only a very small percentage of parents or caregivers can afford to pay for these programmes. In 2006, only 3% of children were enrolled in pre-school, according to national statistics, which is even less than estimated by *Young Lives* data (see below). In contrast with rapidly growing primary enrolment rates, growth at pre-school level has been limited and much slower, with an increase in coverage of only 2% between 1999 and 2006 (UNESCO 2008). Along

with scarce access to pre-primary education is a lack of qualified teachers in these programmes (Hoot et al. 2004). Official recognition of the neglect of early childhood services has resulted in recent development of a draft national policy framework, which will hopefully provide the basis for positive reform to support future generations of young children.

### Who goes to pre-school? Access, equity and quality

When the *Young Lives* household survey was carried out in 2006 (Round 2), children in the younger cohort were around 6 years old. Only 4% had already begun primary school, which is to be expected, given that 7 years is formally defined as the start of the primary school cycle. Educational opportunities in the pre-school years were limited for *Young Lives*' 6-year-olds, although much higher than would have been expected from the national statistics quoted above. This discrepancy probably reflects incomplete monitoring of the rapidly growing number of private services. Overall, 24.9% of children were reported by their caregivers to have attended pre-school at some point since the age of 3 years, with no significant gender differences in pre-school attendance ( $p>0.05$ ). The average age for starting pre-school among the *Young Lives* sample was 4 years old, with around 14.3% starting at the age of 3 and 6.9% waiting

until they were between 5 and 6 years old. Girls seem to start a bit later than boys (boys=48 months; girls=49 months), although this difference is not statistically significant ( $p>0.05$ ).

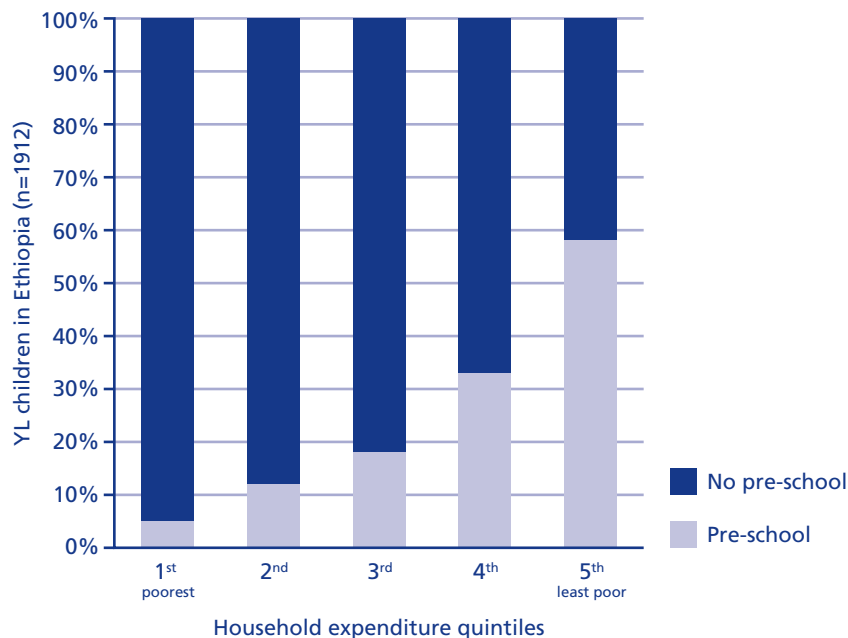
Pre-school attendance is associated with poverty levels, strongly disadvantaging the poorest groups, as shown in Figure 2.1. This figure divides the *Young Lives* sample into five quintiles (groups of equal size) according to their per capita household expenditure. Thus, the 20% of families with the lowest per capita household expenditure are in the first quintile (poorest), while the 20% of families with the highest per capita household expenditure are in the fifth quintile (least poor)<sup>2</sup>.

Only 5% of the poorest children had access to some kind of pre-school, compared to 57% of the most advantaged group in the sample. However, these inequalities are better understood when taking account of where children live (especially rural versus urban sites) and the type of pre-school they attend.

The opportunity to attend pre-school is almost entirely restricted to urban children. Nearly 58% of children in urban communities had attended pre-school at some point since the age of 3 years. In contrast, less than 4% of rural children had attended pre-school. Indeed, for many rural communities, even accessing basic primary

<sup>2</sup> Household expenditure is considered the most appropriate poverty indicator, based on data from *Young Lives* survey of individual households and calculated as the sum of the estimated value (approximated to the past 30 days i.e. a month), of food (bought + home grown + gifts/transfers) and non-food (excluding durables such as furniture, gold jewellery and one-off expenditure). This monthly figure is then divided by household size.

Figure 2.1. Pre-school attendance since the age of 3 years by poverty levels – Ethiopia



schooling remains elusive. Moreover, in those few cases where rural children did access pre-school, they did so later (average of 55 months) than their urban counterparts (48 months).

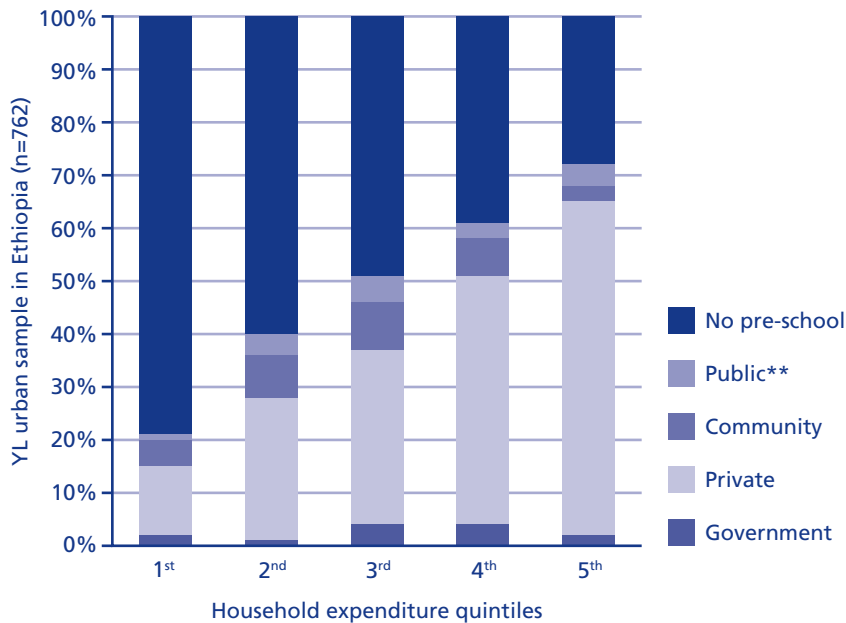
Figure 2.2 shows the different types of pre-school attended by children in urban areas according to their level of poverty, based on information about the most recent pre-school attended. This highlights the modest but fairly equitable role played by government and community-based services. It also confirms that private pre-schools are the main option for all groups (accounting for nearly 70% of those who have attended a pre-school), and that access to private pre-schools strongly favours the more advantaged urban groups. Being unable to pay fees was the main reason (given by more than 15% of urban caregivers) for not

sending their children to pre-school.

Mothers' and fathers' own education levels are associated significantly with enrolling their children in pre-school. Family size and birth order are also significant factors, such that households with more children were less likely to enrol their child in pre-school, and later born children were less likely to be enrolled than first born children. This is perhaps linked partly to pre-school costs and to the availability of care from older siblings (Woldehanna et al. 2008).

The *Young Lives* Round 2 household survey in 2006 asked caregivers to give their view on the quality of their child's pre-school. They were asked: "In your opinion, how good is the quality of the care and teaching at this pre-school?" Figure 2.3 summarises caregivers' judgements on private pre-school (the numbers attending

Figure 2.2. Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels – urban sample in Ethiopia \*



\* This analysis is based on children in urban areas, because the sample of rural children with pre-school experience was too small (n=43).

\*\* Public schools refer to schools that are funded partly by government and partly by fees paid by students.

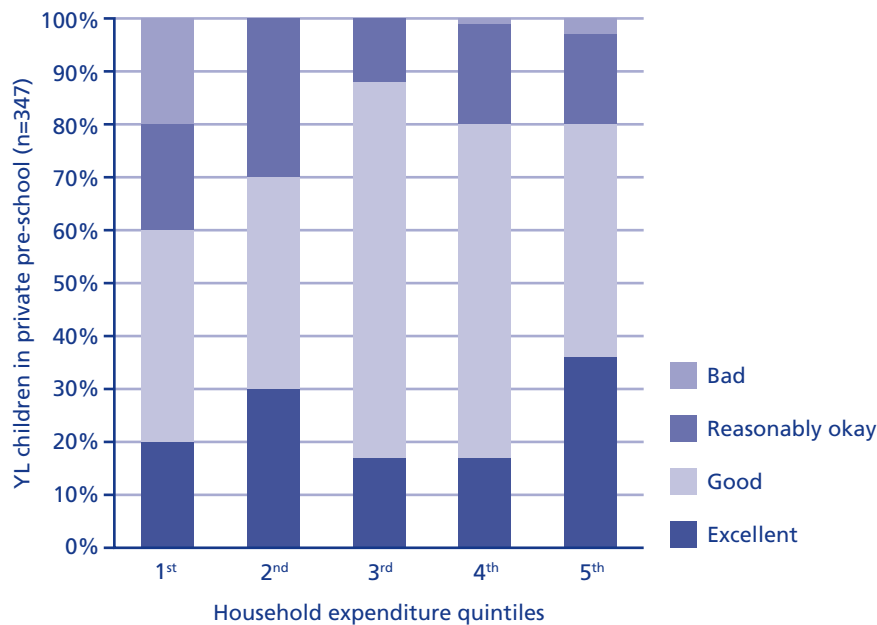
government pre-schools were insufficient for meaningful analysis). Overall, satisfaction levels appear to be higher amongst least poor families, with only 10–20% judging the service they use as only ‘okay’, or ‘bad’. In contrast, 30–40% of private pre-school users from the poorest quintiles judged the service they use as only ‘okay’, or ‘bad’. Without additional (e.g. observational) evidence on the quality of the pre-schools attended by *Young Lives* children, it is not possible to treat these comparisons as evidence of the relative quality of services available to different groups, since they are based on the judgements of individual parents about their own personal experience. But they are nonetheless indicative, and consistent with

what might be expected, namely in those cases where poor families are able to access pre-school, they are only able to afford services that are lower cost, and very likely (although not inevitably) lower quality. These impressions are borne out in the next section, which looks in greater detail at selected individual experiences of early education and transitions to school.

### Experiences of early transitions in Ethiopia

The *Young Lives*’ survey data draws attention to the increasing significance of education in the lives of Ethiopian children and the marked contrasts according to poverty levels and whether

*Figure 2.3. Caregivers' perceptions of quality in private pre-schools by poverty levels – Ethiopia*



they are growing up in rural or urban areas. This section explores these contrasting experiences in greater detail, based on qualitative research carried out with a sub-sample of children from the *Young Lives* younger cohort. These children were aged 6–7 years when the research teams made their first in-depth study in 2007. The study covered children's, parents' or other caregivers' and teachers' perceptions, expectations and experiences of pre-school and primary education, as well as some school- and community-based observations (as described in Chapter 1). Case studies for three children are presented as a vehicle for exploring early transitions.

Beniam and Louam live at the same rural site, referred to as 'Tach-Meret' in this report. Addisu lives in a suburb of the capital, called 'Nagade Sefar' in this report. These cases high-

light some of the main issues faced by Ethiopian children, including rural–urban disparities in access and quality of education.

### ***Beniam and Louam: early education in a rural community***

Beniam and Louam are growing up in Tach-Meret, a rural community located in the Laygaint *woreda* (district) of the Amhara national regional state. Here, the majority of the population belongs to the Amhara ethnic group, and most of the families make their living through farming. There is a 1<sup>st</sup> cycle primary school (Grades 1–4) within the community and a 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle primary school (Grades 5–8) nearby (although students from distant hamlets may need to walk for more than two hours to reach it). Public pre-school provision in Tach-Meret is non-existent.

According to one of the primary school teachers interviewed:

“The government has not given emphasis to pre-school education in the rural areas. Although the expectation of the government was that private and non-governmental organisations would be involved in the expansion of kindergarten both in the urban and rural areas, this has not worked in the rural areas.”

The same teacher reiterated that due to the absence of pre-school, young children join 1<sup>st</sup> grade without any preparation and this has an adverse effect on their educational performance in primary school.

Children in Tach-Meret have little prospect of accessing early education as there is no state-operated pre-school in the area. There is one alternative, available to boys in the community. As in most rural areas of the country, there is a traditional religious school in Tach-Meret, a *kes timirt bet*, which literally means priest school. The predominant religion in the area is Christianity, with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church playing a central role in education. However, despite being the only place providing some kind of pre-school education in the community, most families prefer not to send their children to this school for a number of reasons (See Box 2.1).

In short, the main options for the vast majority of young children in rural areas are: a) waiting until they reach normal school age (7 years)

and are admitted into formal primary school without any previous schooling experience; b) attending a religious school from an early age which may not be suitable for everyone, especially for girls (see Box 2.1); or c) being sent (informally) to school with their older siblings and making the most of the experience by learning something about school discipline, alphabets and numbers.

The challenges for education in Tach-Meret are not limited to the absence of pre-schools. In-depth interviews with parents, other caregivers and teachers, as well as school-based observations, drew attention to the very low levels of resources available at the government primary school. Below is an extract from a classroom observation report of Tach-Meret primary school:

“...children had no chairs or tables in their classrooms. Children were observed sitting either on stones or long wooden benches made from whole tree trunks. Others sit on the floor and use their knee as a table for writing. Children have little access to library and toilets. The rooms are poorly built, and the floor is made of loose stones. Students share textbooks. Children also complained that some teachers are repeatedly absent from schools and they spend their time without learning anything.”

Parent interviews also confirmed the poor quality of government primary schools:

“The external body of the school building is made from mud. It has a yard and a fence.

**BOX 2.1: Role of religious schools in rural Ethiopia**

Education was a function associated with the church in Ethiopia from its earliest days. According to one *kes timirt bet* teacher, children learn alphabets and numbers but also receive religious education. The *kes timirt bet* is not intended to prepare young children for formal schooling. Instead, these schools aim to prepare pupils, mainly boys, who are ready to continue their religious education and become priests in the future. Girls can, in principle, attend church schools to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills, and get basic religious education; however, the teacher in Tach-Meret had never had girls among his pupils. In fact, all of his current 30 students are boys and most of them come from rather distant communities. This issue is highlighted by Louam's mother:

"Religious school is [more] useful for boys than girls. If she joins it for the sake of counting Amharic alphabets, she can join it. But it is more significant for boys than girls because when boys grow up, they can join the church and become priests, and can continue their job, but that is not possible for girls. In addition, the school is far from our home so she might get a problem on the road, like beating by others. It might be impossible for her to return back from school. So, she prefers to join formal school and we have a plan to send her to government school. The religious school is not important for her future life although it is useful to learn alphabets."

In addition to all this, *kes timirt bet* do not follow a systematic approach to teaching. A teacher in one of these traditional church schools said that classes are taught by a single teacher who hosts children in his own home, because there is no specific school building. Sometimes the teacher holds classes outside in the open field. The teachers have no permanent salaries, so according to Beniam's father (see case study), teachers spend much of their time working on their own farms and allocate only limited time to the teaching. Another concern of Beniam's father is that most teachers were not originally from the community, and have little knowledge about local realities. So, he did not believe children would receive a proper education. Various community representatives interviewed (such as elders, service providers and *kebele* officials) also agreed that the traditional church education was not beneficial for the children of the community, especially in supporting their transition to primary school.

But it has no toilet or library. Children have no place to read. As a whole, many necessary things are not available in the school."

High pupil-to-teacher ratios are another challenge. In the Tach-Meret primary school, the register of children enrolled in the first grades

would suggest ratios of 80 children to each teacher. However, high absentee rates mean that the numbers actually attending on any one day can be very variable. For example, *Young Lives* researchers observed 38 children in one class, less than half the number registered. They observed 24 boys and 14 girls; the gender





*The library in a rural primary school*

difference in actual attendance is indicative and would not show up in enrolment statistics. The teacher reported that during harvesting and other peak times for farming, many students miss classes for 15 days or more.

There are additional obstacles facing families who would like their children to go to primary school. Attendance is costly, even when education is provided ‘free of charge’ by the government. According to a primary school teacher in Tach-Meret, most households in the community are ‘very poor’ and find it difficult to cover the cost of school-related expenses such as educational materials. There are also the ‘opportunity costs’ for households whose income marginally meets the family’s basic needs: children are expected to play an active role in their family’s economic activity by working on the farm or at home, and most combine this with attending school. Looking after the animals is a major activity for children,

especially boys. As one of the participant parents put it, a child is called a “good shepherd when he is 8”.

Beniam lives with both his parents and three siblings. Even at 6 years old, he already has a variety of responsibilities at home and in the fields. He takes care of his 1-year-old brother, fetches water and cleans the house. He also sells goods in the small family shop when his mother is dealing with other domestic chores. In the morning, he helps his mother clean out the cattle dung and during the daytime he looks after the cattle in the field. This has been Beniam’s early education, learning numerous important basic skills relevant to his family’s situation. Looking ahead, Beniam’s father thinks formal schooling will be “*useful for the child*”, especially in a context where agricultural work is not as promising as in the past years. According to him they “*are running out of land to support [themselves] in farming*” and “*there is weather pollution here...the water has dried up*”. All this is putting farming at risk and therefore he does not think “*...anyone will send their children to the farm*” anymore.

Beniam’s father expected his son to start at the government primary school in 2007, but teachers said he was too young to be admitted. Even when he starts school, Beniam will still have to find ways of combining his education with domestic chores and work to help support his family.

However, there are solutions for boys like Beniam who have major responsibilities beyond school. Some children in Tach Meret have found an interesting way of balancing work and school;





*Looking after the cattle*

they work in groups. Around 15 children get together and organise the animal herding by turns. All children bring their animals to a specific location and one of them looks after the animals while the others go to school or to do other activities. In this way, children miss school only once in every two weeks, instead of every day. This system would help children like Beniam to attend school regularly.

Like Beniam, Louam did not attend pre-school. Her mother had not considered the *kes timirt bet* church school an option (see box 2.1). She was disappointed when she was not able to get Louam formally enrolled in primary school in 2007, despite feeling her daughter was ready. As the youngest child in the family, Louam's mother explained that she did not want her daughter to stay at home while her

older brothers and sisters went to school. So she sends Louam to school anyway, informally, with her older sister. According to Louam's mother, most of her peers had already started first grade but the school administration prevented her registration saying that she was not ready for school. This highlights another significant barrier faced particularly by rural children in Ethiopia. Many parents do not know their children's precise age, and they do not have a birth certificate. Without the required documentation, families are unable to prove their children's age and the children may not be able to start primary school at the appropriate age. In the absence of documentation, many schools use a traditional indicator of children's 'school readiness' based on physical maturity. Teachers ask children to stretch one hand over their head and touch their ear. Once a child's arm is long enough to touch the opposite ear, they are deemed ready for school. During the group interviews, caregivers of the younger cohort children complained about the school administration as follows:

"The school administration refused to accept our children under the pretext that they are below the age of joining school. The method that the school used to identify the age of the students is very vague. It stated that they should be able to put their hand over their head and touch their ear"

For this reason, Louam's mother decided to send her daughter to school with an older sister, even though she wasn't formally registered. As she put it, "*Louam has not yet been registered*

*because she can't catch her ear properly*". Louam describes her own experience as follows:

"I am left behind when all of my friends go...The school has turned me out of the class many times just because I am not a formal member of the class...the monitor in the class beats me when I talk with my friends; I have been beaten twice up until now. He has beaten me with a stick and kicked me out of the class, and the teacher has supported the decision of the monitor."

Louam is not alone. Four other caregivers interviewed were also sending their children with older siblings. These children will not pass to the next grade as they are considered underage, but the learning will help them to acquire some writing and speaking skills, which are very much valued by their parents.



*Children demonstrate the ear-touching test*

According to the teachers, however, age is not the major factor delaying children from starting school in this community. Distance also discourages some children from joining school. The Director of the primary school in Tach-Meret emphasised that many children must walk for over an hour to reach the primary school. He added that many children from distant hamlets have not joined school, partly because of the long walk, which is particularly difficult for smaller children. Apparently, the local government is planning to construct alternative schools in each hamlet to address the problem.

#### ***Addisu: early education in an urban community***

Addisu's life is very different from that of Beniam and Louam and has some advantages. He attended a private kindergarten and he is now in private primary school. As Addisu himself explained:

"I started kindergarten when I was 3 years old. Before I joined kindergarten, I had different ideas about the school from what I actually observed later on. I thought that there was no teacher in the school. I assumed that it was a place for playing and the compound is full of play materials. I nagged my parents to send me to the school because I wanted to play and to get fun there. After I joined the school, I saw the difference. Of course, there were different kinds of play materials in the school but we were allowed to play only until we joined KG3. The teachers said that the older

children would damage the play materials, so they were only for the younger children.”

While being able to pay for private kindergarten gives Addisu some advantage over Beniam and Louam, he also faces difficult challenges because of growing up in a city. He lives in ‘Nagade Sefar’ district, close to the centre of Addis Ababa. Addisu’s mother does not believe Nagade Sefar is a good place for a child to grow up. There are gangs in the neighbourhood and the levels of criminality and insecurity are high.

While Addisu’s parents may have more options where schooling is concerned, in practice these options are limited because of the poor quality of many government and private schools. Addisu’s account of being beaten even at pre-school is typical:

“Even though I was very happy with the education, sometimes the teachers beat us even when we hadn’t been naughty. There is one old woman in the school. She looks out for us when we are late and hits us with a strong stick. She also beat us when we didn’t wash our hands after having food. I was afraid of her. I hate to get hit.”

For families who cannot afford private pre-school in Nagade Sefar, there is a traditional *kes timirt bet*. The contribution of church schools to pre-school education in urban areas is declining due to the expansion of formal (mainly private) kindergartens. According to a group of parents who participated in focus group discussions, the church school is less

well organised than private kindergartens. The fees, however, are very low at 10 birr (US\$1) per month, and for this reason it may be an alternative for the poorest families in the area.

Children whose parents can afford private kindergarten take this option, as in the case of Addisu. Even though school fees in private kindergartens can be five times higher than in church schools (50 birr per month), they have several advantages. Firstly, children can start pre-school education earlier, joining at the age of 3 years (they can join church schools only when they reach the age of 4 years). Secondly, children can learn English in addition to the Amharic alphabet, and thirdly, they have access to play materials and other recreational facilities.

While many children in Nagade Sefar transfer from private kindergartens to the public primary school system, Addisu’s parents made the decision to send their son to join first grade at a private primary school. According to Addisu’s mother, the school offered a better education with better facilities and teacher-to-child ratios than in the government primary school. She commented that a good school is:

“...when students learn in one class and there is small number of students. In Addisu’s pre-school, there were around 40 to 50 students learning in a single classroom, with only two teachers for around seven of these classrooms” (*Young Lives*’ field reports on Addisu’s private kindergarten observe the actual child-to-adult ratio as 37:1.)

Other parents and local representatives confirmed the impression that the quality of education is better in private than in government schools. When interviewed, they explained that teachers are better trained and supervised, and put greater emphasis on the physical and psychological development of the children. The schools are better furnished, the compound is cleaner, and there are enough toilets.

For example, fieldworkers visited a government primary school in Nagade Sefar. This used to be a private school with kindergarten, but was recently converted into a government school without kindergarten. The school was not properly fenced, had no outdoor play materials, except a small football field, and there were not enough toilets for the students. Classrooms were even more crowded than in the rural school in Tach-Meret, with between 70 and 80 children observed in each classroom, and official enrolment rates even higher.

In contrast, Addisu's mother thinks her son is attending a "good school" because he is becoming more independent and is learning English earlier than he would in other schools. She says: *"now he orders me to talk him in English – I am happy when he speaks in English"*. Addisu's mother also points out other changes between pre-school and primary school:

"When he joined first grade there were no play materials. He used to ask for that but he knows that it is not their responsibility to provide these materials... Before he used to learn from his teacher, but now he tries to write fast

and copy everything that is written on the blackboard since it is cleaned immediately."

Addisu's mother does have some concerns about her son's progress, feeling he is not doing very well at school and that he "needs proper follow up". She recounts that her son's teacher told her to help the child in his studies and to urge him to focus on his lessons.

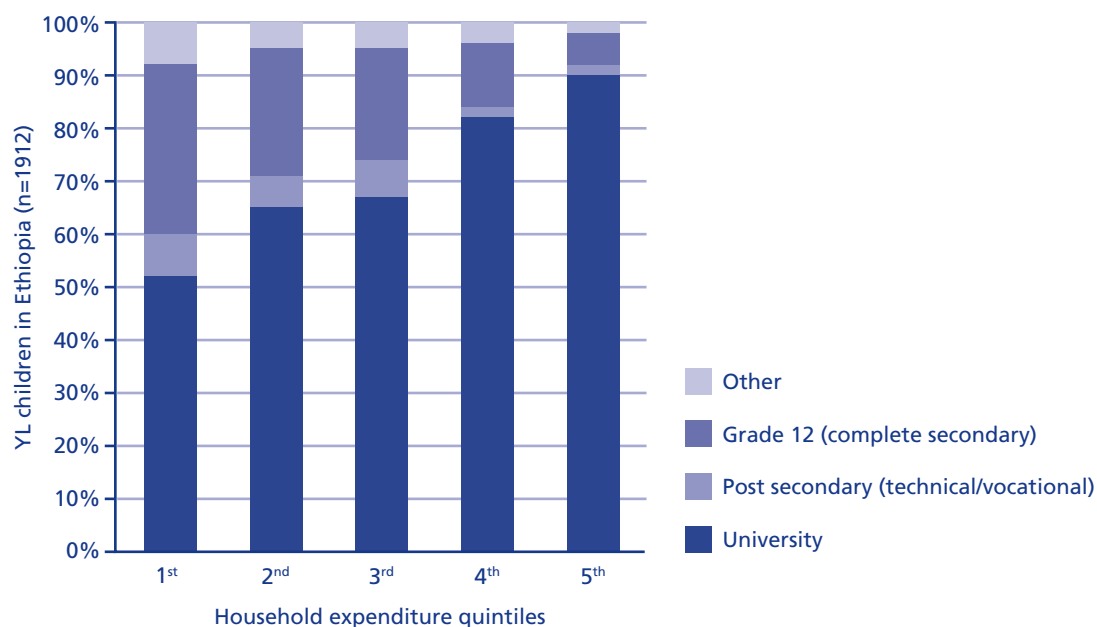
In summary, the parents of these three Ethiopian children all recognise the value of education, even though their ability to support their children's schooling is strongly shaped by the opportunities that are available, as well as their own circumstances. To understand more about parents' expectations, the next section returns to the findings from the full sample surveys.

## Early transitions and long-term expectations

*Young Lives* surveys asked parents and caregivers what level of education they expect their children to achieve. Figure 2.4 shows that parents in Ethiopia have high expectations for their children, but the level of expectation is clearly linked to relative poverty.

Around 90% of families in the fifth quintile (least poor) expect their children to attend university, while only 52% of the 'poorest' expect their children to do so. There are notable differences between rural and urban families ( $p < 0.05$ ). While 85% of urban caregivers want their children to complete university education, the figure for the rural sample is only 61%.

Figure 2.4. Caregivers' expectations of child's educational achievement by poverty levels – Ethiopia



Results from the older cohort of children in Ethiopia show an interesting trend. Here, the percentage of 12-year-olds hoping to attend university was higher among the rural than the urban sample (52% versus 48%) and the difference was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Differences by gender in both caregivers' and older children's expectations concerning university education were statistically significant only in rural areas (boys 62% versus girls 59%;  $p < 0.05$ ). These high educational aspirations are of course totally unrealistic for the vast majority of these children, as the case studies make clear. For example, Addisu's mother explained her ambitions for her son. She wants him to complete grade four by the age of 10, transfer to a better private school and eventually graduate from university. Addisu is equally ambitious. He wants to be a doctor, a pilot or a policeman

after completing his university education. He also wants to be employed abroad, possibly in Germany where his uncle is working. Louam's mother has less ambitious expectations. She wishes her daughter to complete grade 10 or 12 and then to get a job. She said that "*completing grade 10 or 12 is enough for girls like Louam*". Finally, Beniam's father would like his son to continue his education up to university level and then to become a bank manager; to have good job and help his parents. More immediately, he needs to ensure Beniam gets a place in the village primary school next year, when he will be 7 years old. However, Beniam has no plans to join school; he want to be a good shepherd (and a good farmer). Here is what he said:

INTERVIEWER – Do you want to learn in the future?

BENIAM – No.

INTERVIEWER – Why?

BENIAM – I don't have the interest.

INTERVIEWER – So, what do you want to be?

BENIAM – Looking after cattle.

INTERVIEWER – Why?

BENIAM – I just like looking after cattle.

## Summary

- Ethiopia has been singled out in recent UNESCO Global Monitoring Reports as making rapid progress towards EFA goals, despite being amongst the poorest group of countries.
- Increases in primary education enrolment rates now need to be matched by improvements in infrastructure, educational materials, professional training, pupil-to-teacher ratios, etc.
- The Government of Ethiopia recognises the pre-primary phase of education for children aged 4–6 years, but active engagement in provision has been minimal and in practice, ECCE is mainly provided by the private sector.
- 25% of *Young Lives* caregivers surveyed when their children were 6 years old reported their children had attended pre-school at some point since the age of 3 years.
- Access amongst the rural sample is low (4% of children) compared to the urban sample (58% of children). A small gender difference (2%) favours boys accessing pre-school.
- Within urban areas, attendance levels are linked strongly to poverty, with only around 20% of the poorest fifth of households accessing pre-school, compared with around 70% of the more advantaged fifth.
- Private pre-schools account for nearly 70% of the children who attended pre-school in urban communities. Government and NGO services play a minor role but are distributed more equitably across household poverty levels.
- Caregivers' perceptions of the quality of the pre-schools attended by their children are also linked to poverty. Around 80% of the more advantaged households described their child's pre-school as 'good' or 'excellent', compared with 60–70% of the poorer households. Around 20% of the very poorest households gave the lowest quality rating, 'bad', which was rarely used by other groups.
- Case studies for Beniam and Louam in a rural community highlight the very limited opportunities for early education except for a traditional religious school for boys. Children do not expect to start school until around 7 years, and age-eligibility for admission may be disputed by schools in the absence of birth certificates.
- Observations within the government primary school confirm the quality challenges, with educational materials in short supply, high pupil-to-teacher ratios and children frequently absent (because of long distances and pressures to contribute to household and farm work).
- The case study for Addisu illustrates an urban child accessing private kindergarten and then making the transition to private primary school. His mother is clear that the quality in private schools is very variable but

they offer much better opportunities, when parents can afford this option.

- Caregivers' educational aspirations for their 6-year-olds are shaped strongly by poverty, with 90% of the most advantaged anticipa-

ting university attendance compared with 52% of the poorest households. Educational aspirations are lower amongst rural than urban households, but for most children, these high aspirations will not be realised.



## Chapter 3: Early childhood and primary education in Peru

### Policy context

The MDG of primary education for all children by 2015 is close to being achieved in Peru, with a net enrolment ratio of 96% in 2005 (UNESCO 2007). However, despite improving access to primary education, Peru still has a medium EFA Development Index of 0.931, ranking 70 out of 129 countries (UNESCO 2008), an indication that realisation of EFA goals is not yet guaranteed. Peru's main education problems are related not only to provision, but also to inequality of access to quality education for the poor and for different cultural and linguistic communities.

The issue of educational quality is now the major concern for Peru, as shown by international assessments of educational achievement. On the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)<sup>3</sup> Peru's scores were the lowest among the Latin American study countries and about 20% behind the average for Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico (World Bank 2007). Recent monitoring work in 11 developing countries identified Peru as having the worst resourced schools, along with India and Sri Lanka, in terms of poor buildings, lack of textbooks, inadequate seating space and poor toilets, amongst other things (Zhang et al. 2008).

Moreover, another recent assessment in Peru found that only 30% of children attending first grade and about half in second grade could read simple passages from a textbook (Crouch 2006).

National student assessments also yield disappointing results. According to a 2007 National Evaluation of second grade students, less than 16% performed at a desirable level in Spanish (*'comunicación integral'*), and only 7% achieved satisfactory levels in mathematics (*'lógico-matemática'*) (UMC 2007). Overall performance in both subjects in private schools is almost double that of public schools (UMC 2007). In contrast, percentages were lower among children attending multi-grade and single-teacher schools, which are available mainly in rural areas.

*Young Lives* research also points to poor educational outcomes for many Peruvian children. High proportions were unable to master simple tasks in literacy and numeracy and were in a lower grade than expected for their age. Educational achievement is clearly linked to poverty, area of residence and mother's language<sup>4</sup>. Spanish-speaking children from less poor households living in urban areas performed far better than poor; rural Quechua speakers (Cueto et al. 2005; Cueto 2008).

<sup>3</sup> PISA evaluations assess to what extent students nearing the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society. More information available at [www.pisa.oecd.org/](http://www.pisa.oecd.org/)

<sup>4</sup> Educational outcome is proxy by measuring 'cognitive skills' (both cohorts) and mathematics achievement (older cohort only). Cognitive skills were assessed by the administration of a receptive vocabulary measure (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test –PPVT), and a mathematic test which consisted of 10 items measuring number and number sense.



Regarding early education, Peru has experienced a rapid expansion, in common with many other countries in the region. Since 1972, early education became a high priority for the government. Pre-school was renamed 'Initial Education', serving children under the age of 6 years and provided in both formal and non-formal settings. It is estimated that gross enrolment rates in pre-school education in Peru more than doubled from 30% in 1991 to 68% in 2006 (see [www.uis.unesco.org](http://www.uis.unesco.org)). However, from these figures it is impossible to tell how many of these children attended pre-school on a regular basis. In its 2008 'State of the Children in Peru' report, UNICEF analyses pre-school attendance among 3–5-year-olds by introducing an indicator of continuous (regular) pre-school attendance. This indicator is based on pre-school attendance data from the 2006 National Household Survey (ENAHU) for children aged 3 and 4–5 years who had attended pre-school for at least one year. The reanalysis revealed that only 49% of children aged 3–5 had continuously attended pre-school since the age of 3 years, with 36% in rural and 60% in urban areas (UNICEF 2008).

Rapid expansion in early education has been due partly to the development and implementation of non-formal community-based programmes over several decades, in response to Peru's social, cultural, linguistic and geographical diversity (UNESCO-IBE 2006), as well as to

more recent expansion of private education provision (MINEDU 2003).

Early education provision in Peru has been traditionally mainly government funded, with two major forms accounting for most provision in the years immediately before children start first grade. Formal early education consists of *Centros de Educación Inicial* (CEIs) for children aged 3–5 years. These early education centres have a 'qualified' teacher, paid by the Ministry of Education, and follow a standard pre-school curriculum set by the Ministry. CEIs have been supplemented by non-formal community-based programmes called *Programas no Escolarizados de Educación Inicial* (PRONOEIs). These follow a more flexible approach so as to ensure the inclusion of children within the education system. These programmes were based on a *Wawa Wasi* initiative in Puno in 1969, which arose from the need to provide parents with care and support for their children while they worked in the fields<sup>5</sup>.

PRONOEIs became a lower-cost alternative for the government to expand coverage and enrolment, since the community provides the building and furniture and no certified pre-school teacher is allocated. Sessions are delivered by community-based 'animators' who are supervised and guided by a teacher-coordinator from the Ministry of Education. Animators receive payment as 'volunteers' of

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<sup>5</sup> The National Wawa Wasi Programme is now administered by the Ministry for Women and Social Development (MIMDES) and consists of community-based day care centres for children aged 6 to 48 months.

about one third that earned by a pre-school teacher. At present, PRONOEIs serve mainly children aged 3–5 years living in rural and marginal urban areas, informal settlements or shanty towns. Although PRONOEIs were at one time an alternative means of reaching remote and smaller communities and overcoming a shortage of teachers, they now tend to be seen as lower resourced versions of formal pre-schools. In policy terms, it is a source of concern that PRONOEIs are now offered mainly to children living in economically and socially deprived areas (60% in rural areas), reinforcing the poor's differential access to quality educational services.

Although most young children in Peru attend government pre-schools, private provision has increased rapidly in recent years. In 1998, the ratio of public to private provision stood at 4:1. However, this ratio decreased to 1.5:1 in 2008<sup>6</sup>. Another indicator of the growing significance of the private sector is that enrolment in private schools has increased by more than 50% between 1993 and 2003, whereas enrolment in government schools increased by only 18% during the same period. Moreover, the number of private early education centres increased by more than 57% from 1998 (5,200 centres) to 2008 (7,543 centres). On the other hand, enrolment rates for the 18,808 PRONOEIs have decreased during the last decade. Despite being successful in enrolling 'poorer' children into

pre-school education, the limited budget allocated to these programmes contributed to the progressive deterioration of education quality, resulting in an increase in drop-out rates. As an illustration, in 2002 only 56% of children enrolled in PRONOEIs were actually attending class (MINEDU 2005). What makes the situation even more worrying is that these programmes are most likely to be the only service available to the most underprivileged and vulnerable children, especially in rural areas.

While the figures show that overall levels of early childhood provision are high in Peru (indeed, the percentage of the age group accessing pre-school is amongst the highest in the region), the statistics disguise significant diversity in access, character, resources and quality of both public and private provision. Of greatest concern is that the 'most vulnerable and disadvantaged children' (prioritised by Dakar Goal 1) are at risk of being excluded from quality pre-school education. This conclusion is confirmed by other national statistics. Inequalities of access are evident particularly for rural areas, where the net enrolment rate for 3–5-year-olds is only 43% compared to 62% in urban areas. Since rural areas also include some of the poorest communities in Peru, this accounts partly for the striking poverty-linked inequalities in access to pre-school. According to the Ministry of Education, in 2004 only 48.8% of those considered as 'extreme poor'

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<sup>6</sup> Refers to the number of private and public (formal and non-formal) early education centres and programmes. Source: Basic Statistics years 1998–2008 available at: [www.escale.minedu.gob.pe](http://www.escale.minedu.gob.pe)



*PRONOEI building in Rioja*



*CEI building in Rioja*

were attending pre-school in contrast to 75% of those classified as ‘non-poor’. This is even more worrying taken alongside evidence that recent increases in pre-school enrolment for the ‘non-poor’ was almost three times that for the poorest (11.5 against 4% between 2002 and 2004) (UEE, 2009).

In response to some of these concerns, the government of Peru increased spending on education from 2.7% of its Gross National Product (GNP) in 2001 to 3.1% in 2006 (UNICEF 2006). Furthermore, in 2006 a new initiative called *Programa de Shock de Inversiones en Infraestructura Educativa* (PRONIED) aimed to improve the buildings and physical condition of schools as well as provide basic furniture to enable the optimal development of teaching and learning activities (see [www.minedu.gob.pe](http://www.minedu.gob.pe)). Another important initiative is the National Plan on Education for All (2005–2015) (MINEDU 2005), developed by the Peruvian Ministry of Education with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The Plan follows the international agreements made at Jomtien and Dakar (see UNESCO 1990 and 2000) and aims, amongst other issues, to “expand opportunities and improve quality of integrated, comprehensive care to children under six years, prioritizing those from economically disadvantaged populations” (MINEDU 2005).

The *Programa Nacional de Apoyo Directo a los más Pobres* (Juntos) has also been successful in getting more children into school. Under this programme, eligible ‘poor’ households who have children under the age of 14 years receive a fixed monthly cash transfer of 100 soles (approximately US\$ 33) per month, conditional on their compliance with accessing basic healthcare and primary education services for their children (Juntos 2009). Although baseline data on school attendance rates is not available within the Juntos programme, a number of qualitative studies suggest some improvements (e.g. Jones et al. 2008).

Other important initiatives that address early childhood education explicitly are the *Plan Nacional de Acción por la Infancia y la Adolescencia 2002–2010* (PNAIA, 2002), which involves different Ministries and must be monitored every year with a report from the Prime Minister to the Congress; and the *Mesa de Concertación de Lucha contra la Pobreza* (MCLCP), which recognises early childhood as a priority group and demands more funding to health and education. Likewise, the *Acuerdo Nacional* has included these demands as part of State policies, acknowledging that attention to early childhood is necessary to reduce poverty and achieve equality of opportunity without discrimination (State policies 10 and 11, *Acuerdo Nacional*, 2004).

In the education sector, a new General Law of Education was approved in 2003. This includes pre-school as part of basic education, making it free and compulsory. Also, for the first time,

a National Education Project (2006–2021) has been produced by the National Council of Education and approved as State Policy in 2007. The National Education Project stresses the need to implement specific policies to contribute to the development of early childhood education and identify issues of equity and quality as the main challenges within the Peruvian educational system. It is also important to mention that a National Evaluation of children aged 5 years attending CEIs and PRONOEIs in rural and urban areas is being carried out in 2008 and the results will be available in 2009. These recent policy initiatives promise a more positive starting point for addressing childhood poverty issues, although implementation and action will need to be closely monitored.

### **Who goes to pre-school? Access, equity and quality**

At the time of the *Young Lives* Round 2 household survey in 2006, the younger cohort were in their final year as ‘pre-schoolers’ (aged 4–5 years), an important transition point. Indeed, 79.4% of the 1,963 children in the sample were reported to be currently attending pre-school, while a further 1.2% of children had already begun the first grade of school, according to their caregivers. This represents a very high participation rate, indeed higher than might

be anticipated by national statistics. The likely explanation is that the sample selected did not include the poorest and most remote rural communities, on account of costs and logistics<sup>7</sup>. The *Young Lives* survey in 2006 also asked caregivers in Peru, as in other countries, whether children had attended pre-school on a regular basis at any time since their third birthday. Not surprisingly, this produced an even higher participation rate, with 83.5% of the sample reported to have had some experience of pre-school. Overall, there is no significant gender difference (84.9% boys and 82.1% girls), however, within rural areas, the gender difference is statistically significant (80% of boys compared with 75% of girls,  $p < 0.05$ ).

These overall figures, however, include many different types of pre-school and include both government and private provision. These can be separated in the analyses that follow. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the relationship between poverty levels and pre-school attendance (as indicated by answers to a question about whether children had attended pre-school at any time since their third birthday). Similar to the previous two chapters, Figure 3.1 ranks the full sample into five quintiles (groups of equal size) according to monthly household expenditure per capita, a measurement used by *Young Lives* as a proxy for household poverty

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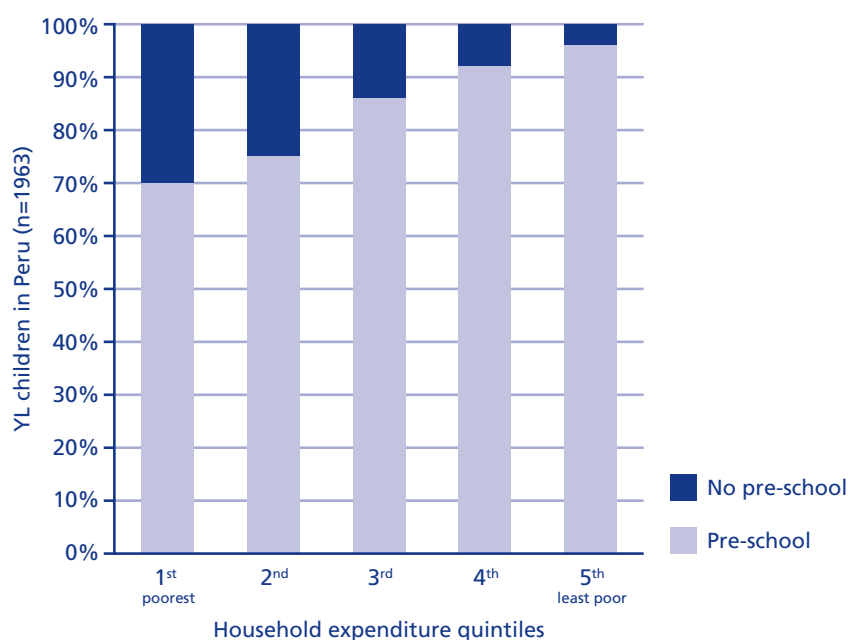
<sup>7</sup> To ensure a representative distribution of districts according to their poverty level, *Young Lives* used the most recent official poverty map of the 1,818 districts in Peru (FONCODES, 2000) to select the 20 sentinel sites by systematic sampling. Factors that determine the poverty ranking of districts included infant mortality estimates, housing, schooling, roads and access to services. The *Young Lives* sample is a purposive pro-poor sample. Thus, 75% of sample sites are considered as poor and 25% as non-poor, according to consumption-based poverty criteria that are widely used by the Peruvian Government (see *Peru Preliminary Country Report*, Escobar et al. 2003).

levels. Expenditure was calculated using data on consumption expenditures on various goods, including both food and non-food items.

Figure 3.1 highlights very clearly that although overall participation rates are relatively high, there are marked inequalities in access to pre-school. In the *Young Lives* Peru sample, 29% of 6-year-olds from the 'poorest' households have no experience of attending pre-school, despite being seen in policy terms as those most likely to benefit (e.g. in preparation for school). In contrast, only 4% of children from the least poor households have not attended pre-school at some point since they were 3 years old. However, these overall figures are misleading in

a number of respects. It is important to distinguish urban from rural sites, and also whether children attend public or private establishments. As in most countries, pre-school services in Peru have evolved most rapidly in urban communities. More than 92% of the urban sample is reported to have attended pre-school at some point since the age of 3 years, compared with 78% of rural children<sup>8</sup>. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 are based on separate analyses of poverty and pre-school for the urban and the rural sample. They confirm that most children attend government provision irrespective of where they live and their household poverty level. (Note that 'government' includes CEIs, PRONOEIs and other government provision, as outlined

Figure 3.1. Pre-school attendance since the age of 3 years by poverty levels – Peru



<sup>8</sup> The Young Lives project follows the same definition of as that outlined by the Peruvian National Statistics Office (INEI), which defines a 'rural' community as one that has less than 100 dwellings and is not the capital of a district.



above). In urban communities, 15.9% of the 'poorest' children did not access pre-school, compared with 2.4% of the 'least poor'. In rural communities, 34.9% of the 'poorest' children did not access pre-school, compared with 6.3% of the 'least poor'. These statistics confirm that rates of attendance at pre-school are linked to poverty levels, for both urban and rural children.

Figure 3.3 also suggests for rural children, that the inequalities are related to differential access to government-run pre-schools, since the private sector is of marginal significance as a provider. However, amongst the 'least poor' group the private sector accounts for nearly 30%. In urban settings, the picture is more complex. The highest percentages of children in government-run pre-schools come from the mid-range quintiles (2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>). Children living in the 'poorest' households have less access to government pre-schools. At the other end of the scale, 'least poor' households make less use of government pre-schools, but 34.1% of these children are attending a private pre-school.

It is also interesting to note trends in parental choice where children have attended more than one pre-school. According to the survey data, 110 children switched between pre-schools, and some switched twice. Twenty-three children changed from government to private pre-schools, whereas only eight transferred from private to government. This same pattern was seen in Andhra Pradesh (see Chapter 4).

In summary, the *Young Lives* survey in 2006 has shown clearly for Peru as for other countries

in the study, that children start school on a far from equitable footing. Whilst overall participation rates are high, it is the poorer households that have lowest participation rates, even though these children might be expected to gain most from pre-school in terms of preparing them for the transition to primary school. The data shown in Figure 3.4 provide additional evidence that patterns of attendance at pre-school in Peru (after a child's third birthday) tend to reinforce inequalities in educational opportunities. Virtually all children with highly educated mothers (who had received more than 10 years' schooling) attended pre-school, whereas over 30% of children whose mothers had low levels of education (0–4 years) will begin first grade without any experience of a pre-school programme. Ethnicity (as indicated in *Young Lives* data on mother's language) also appears to contribute to differences in pre-school enrolment. Nearly 90% of children of Spanish-speaking mothers attended pre-school since the age of 3 years, whereas groups such as Aymara were 18% less likely to have had pre-school experience and native Amazonian were 45% less likely, due most probably to the absence of provision in remote areas. *Young Lives* researchers have identified additional inequities; for example, children with disabilities are less likely to attend pre-school in urban areas, while being a first-born child and having father present at home increases the chances of pre-school enrolment (Escobal et al. 2008).

So far this section has concentrated only on issues of access to pre-school amongst the *Young Lives* sample of young children in Peru.

Figure 3.2. Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels – urban sample in Peru

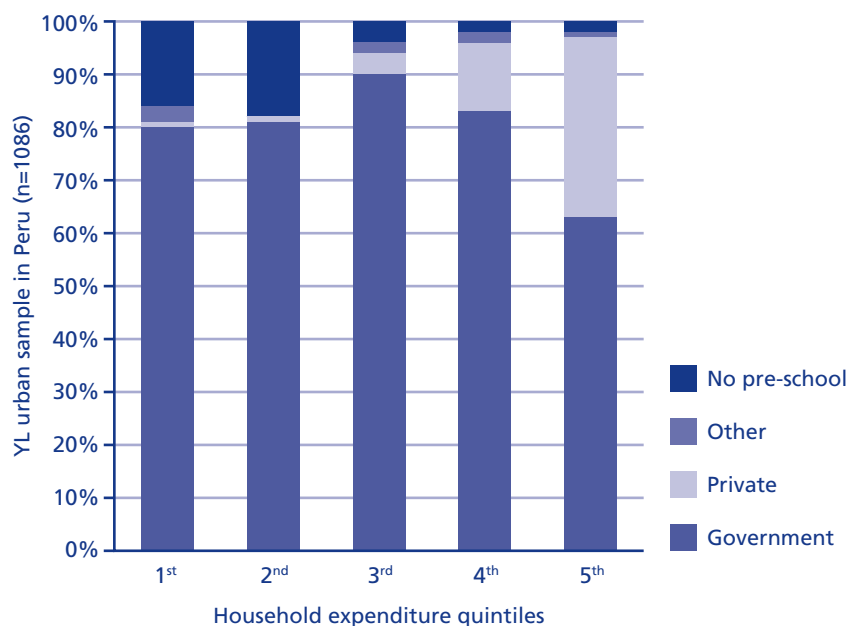


Figure 3.3. Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels – rural sample in Peru

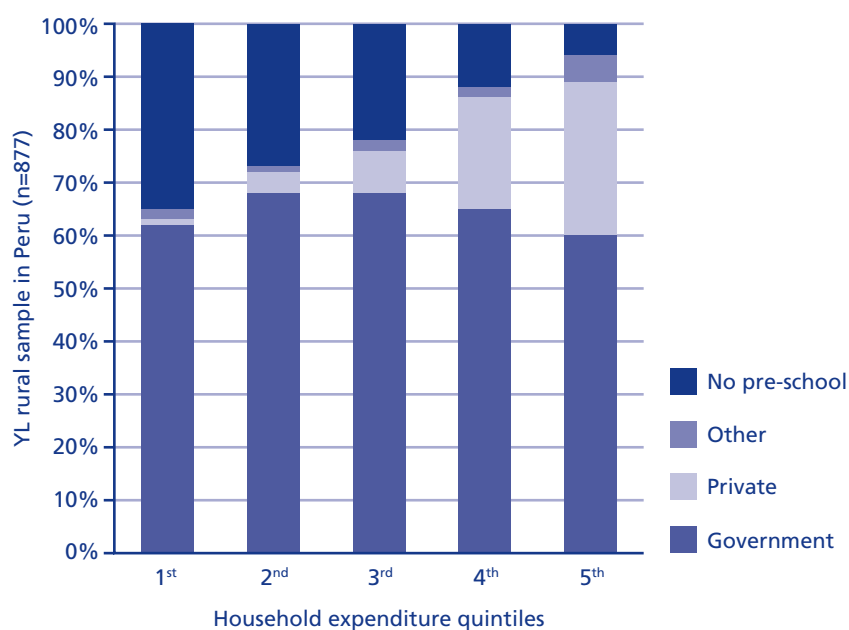
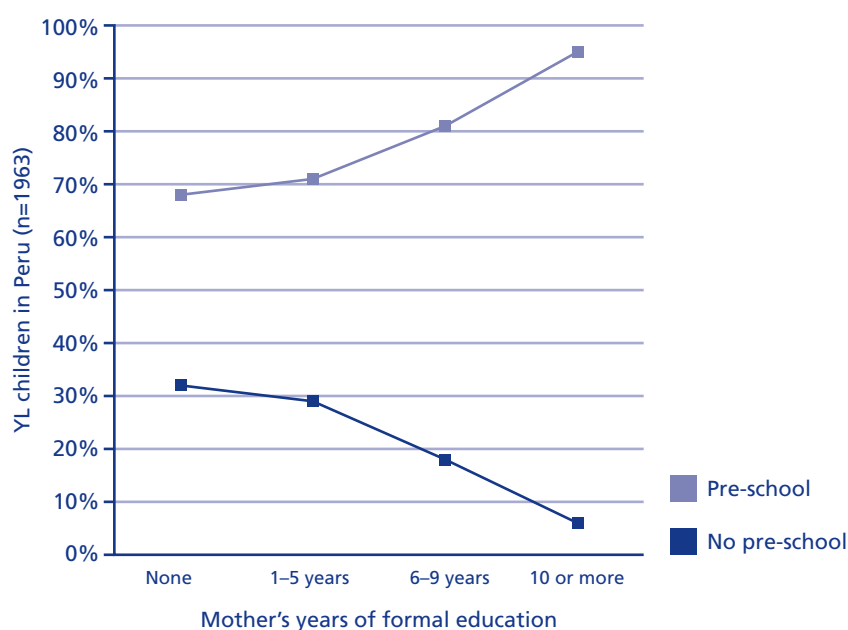




Figure 3.4. Mother's education level and pre-school attendance – Peru



But as for Ethiopia and India, data is also available on caregiver's perceptions of the quality of their child's pre-school. They were asked: "In your opinion, how good is the quality of the care and teaching at this pre-school?" Figures 3.5 and 3.6 summarize their judgements of quality in relation to household poverty levels in government versus private pre-schools. Users of government pre-schools shared similar views irrespective of poverty levels, with a similarly wide variation in views amongst each group, ranging from 'excellent' to 'bad'. A majority rated the quality as 'good', but few judged it to be 'excellent'. Around a third of participants judged the pre-school attended by their child to be 'reasonably okay' or in a few cases 'bad' (less than 2%). The less poor groups appeared to be the most satisfied, with around 75% of caregivers judging the standard of care

and teaching to be 'good' or 'excellent', whereas only 70% in the least advantaged group judged the standard of care and teaching to be 'good' or 'excellent'.

Overall, users of private pre-schools were more satisfied with quality than government pre-school users. But as in Ethiopia, there is a clear trend for the more advantaged groups to rate the private provision they use as higher quality compared with the judgements of the poorest groups. Over 90% of caregivers from middle and higher percentile groups judged the standard of care and teaching to be 'good' or 'excellent'. In contrast, amongst poorer groups, judgements of private pre-school are much closer to those made by users of government pre-school, with 25% of the poorest quintile saying the service was only 'reasonably okay'

Figure 3.5. Caregivers' perceptions of quality in government pre-schools by poverty levels – Peru

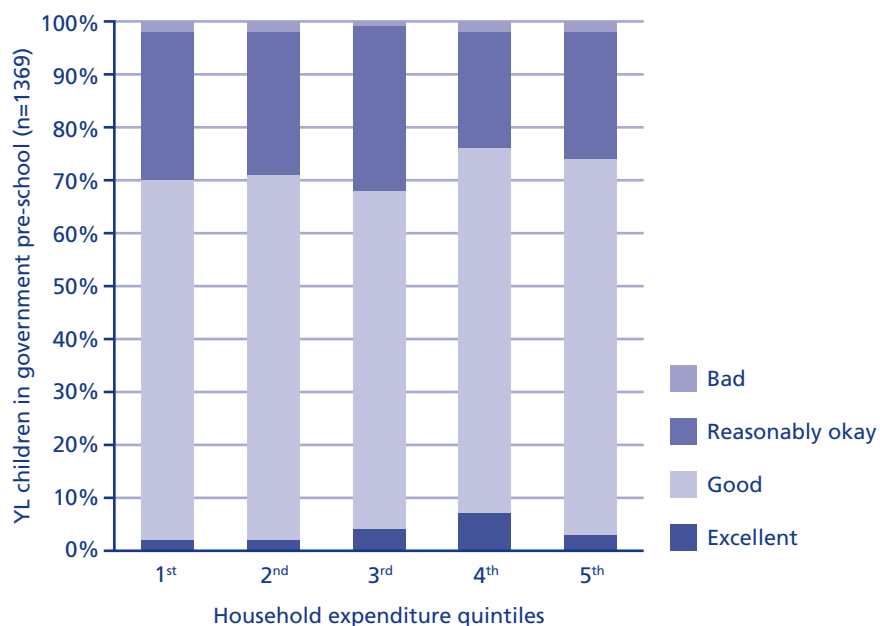
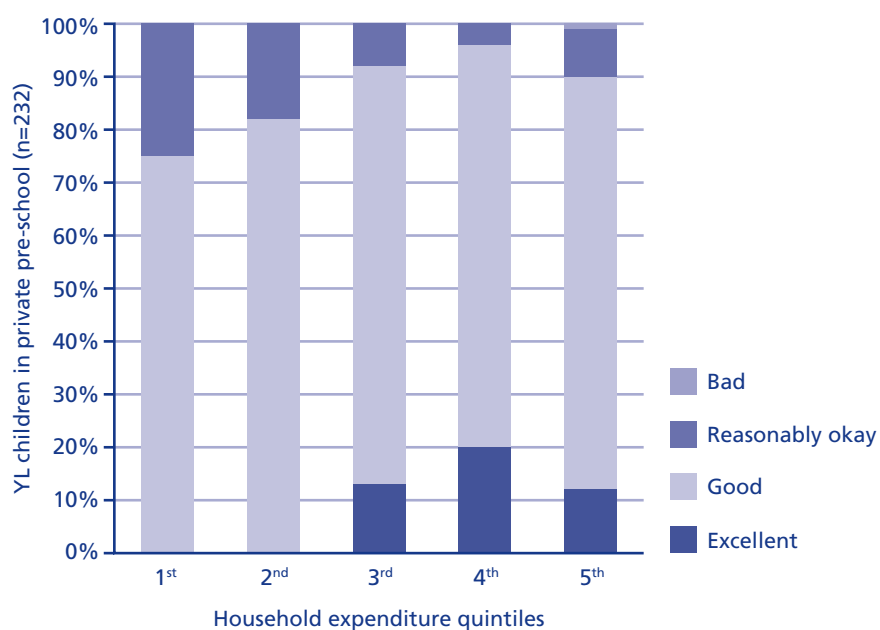


Figure 3.6. Caregivers' perceptions of quality in private pre-schools by poverty levels – Peru



and no ‘excellent’ judgements. Clearly, without additional evidence on quality indicators, it is not possible to treat these comparisons as evidence of the relative quality of services available to households in Peru, since they are based on the judgements of individual parents about their own personal experience, and it is very probable those parents who are paying fees for their child’s education will have an interest in believing they are getting quality for their money. But they are nonetheless indicative, especially the impressions of the lower quality of private pre-school amongst the poorest groups, who might be expected to have the strongest personal investment in believing their child was benefiting from quality provision.

### Experiences of early transitions in Peru

More detailed evidence about children’s earliest experiences of the education system in Peru is being provided by longitudinal qualitative research carried out by the *Young Lives* team, focusing on a sub-sample of 24 children in four contrasting sites selected from the main study (Ames et al. 2009). Two of these are rural communities, referred to in this paper as ‘Andahuaylas’ (a rural and indigenous community situated in the Andes) and ‘Rioja’ (a rural community located in the rainforests of the Upper Amazon). The other two urban communities are ‘Lima 3’, located in the capital city, and ‘San Roman’ in the Andes.

When the children and their caregivers were interviewed in 2007, it was expected that at least three quarters of the sub-sample would be in

pre-school or at home, since the legal age at which children start primary school is 6 years. Surprisingly, 10 children were already enrolled in first grade, whilst 12 were attending formal pre-school (CEI), and two were at home waiting to start first grade the following year (with no pre-school experience). The fact that none of the children were attending PRONOEI came as a surprise, but this may be due to the declining significance of this community-based service, as well as a consequence of the particular sites sampled, which did not include the most isolated rural locations (Ames et al. 2009).

Most children and caregivers were aware of the importance of education – primary education in particular – for their future. According to one mother: “First and second grades are like the foundations” for a child’s education. Many parents and caregivers were also aware that their children’s educational trajectories were shaped by available opportunities and the possibilities of choice in schooling. In rural areas, however, choice is rare, since all schools are public and there is usually only one accessible school and pre-school. Thus, all 12 rural children in the *Young Lives* qualitative sub sample were attending public pre-schools or primary schools. In contrast, parents in the urban areas had greater options, with several public and private schools of different characteristics available in some cases. At the time of the research, seven urban children were attending public primary schools and the other five families had opted for private education since their child had started pre-school. Whether or not these trajectories remain stable is something that

*Young Lives* longitudinal research will examine over time. Parents and caregivers may decide to change from a private to a public school because of financial pressures, or children enrolled in public school may move to a private one if the quality is perceived as better and financial circumstances allow (Ames et al. 2009).

The cost of pre-school, including government pre-school, is a significant issue, affecting families in the poorest rural communities especially. Enrolment in government pre-schools is free but financial contributions are needed for materials, food, parent's association and other expenses such as uniforms and school items. This has a direct bearing on the quality of education children receive, and since the poorest families are able to contribute least to school materials, it is their children who are at risk of having the poorest resourced pre-school. Costs also affect which children actually attend. According to one of the pre-school teachers interviewed in Rioja, only 70–80% of pre-school-age children are attending class. The problem in Rioja, as in many other rural communities, is that parents and caregivers cannot pay for the required school materials and consider pre-school to be “too expensive”. Teachers emphasised the inadequacy of government investment in education materials in the early years:

“...for early education the Ministry of Education gives nothing. For example, for primary schools we've heard they are giving 'modules'...learning modules, including TVs and these things...but for us nothing.”  
(pre-school teacher)

Teachers report complaints from parents that the cost of materials required is even greater than that required by primary schools (Ames et al. 2009). Hidden costs are therefore preventing some parents from sending their children to pre-school. Teachers agreed that they “have a good infrastructure but no pupils”, and despite conducting home visits they still could not convince parents to enrol their children. According to one of the pre-school teachers interviewed:

“...before I started working here in 2003, it seemed that the teachers did not ask for any school materials, nothing, or perhaps just a notebook and pencil. But then when we came to work in that year, it was very difficult with only a notebook and a pencil, it is not possible because they have no materials. Thus, that year we started to ask [parents] for these materials, not a large list, no, just a minimum of 30 Nuevos Soles (10 US\$), that's the minimum. This year we had to lower this down to 20 Nuevos Soles per year (approximately US\$ 7)”

The same teacher added: “*if it [pre-school] was free, everyone would come*”. The consequence is that too many children either have a short pre-school experience when joining primary school or none at all. This makes adaptation into primary school even more difficult. Based on their own experiences, teachers reported that when children without pre-school experience join first grade they “cannot even hold a pencil properly” and this may hinder other children's learning process. Teachers, therefore, ask for pre-school to become a compulsory

prerequisite for starting primary education. These problems are exacerbated by pre-school and primary education remaining independent from each other, which means parents continue to view pre-school as an optional or even unnecessary step on their children's education path and, in some cases, prefer to wait and save money until the time comes for them to start primary school.

Another challenge facing all children is a direct consequence of the separation of pre-school from the primary school system. Whether in public or private provision, making the transition from pre-school to first grade of primary school can be quite challenging. The Peru team focused their research on issues surrounding the readiness of primary schools for children and the contrasting perspectives of children, caregivers and teachers on this particular transition (Arnold et al. 2007; Ames et al. 2009). The situation in Peru is similar to that found in many regions of the world, namely, most pre-school services are administratively and institutionally separate from primary schooling, with different professional structure, educational philosophy and curriculum (Woodhead and Moss 2007). These divisions make for a challenging transition for children and their families, although children are generally resilient in the face of the many discontinuities they experience between life at pre-school and in first grade. Three major areas of discontinuity highlighted by the research include: a) weak communication, coordination and integration of pre-school and primary systems; b) differences in organisation and culture of classrooms,

as well as in training between pre-school and primary school teachers; and c) lack of preparation of and support to children and caregivers for their transition to primary school (Ames et al. 2009).

Four children illustrate these issues. Hugo attends public pre-school in a rural community, while Carmen from the same community has no pre-school experience. Both Lupe and Eva have attended urban pre-school but were then transferred to primary schools within the public and private sector respectively. The last two cases highlight some of the disparities between public and private education in Peru.

### **Hugo and Carmen: early education in a rural community**

Hugo was 5 years old at the time of the first round of qualitative fieldwork. He lives with both his parents and his older sister in Rioja, a rural jungle district located in the San Martin region. This site has high levels of poverty and low levels of caregivers' educational participation and access to home services. At the time of the qualitative research, Hugo was attending government CEI pre-school (see Box 3.1). He started pre-school at the age of 4 years but dropped out only five months later, after an incident during which another child threw a stone at him. Hugo needed stitches to the wound on his head, and from that moment he refused to go back to pre-school. According to his mother he used to say: *"I'm not going; no, I'm not going. Do you want me to get killed? Do you want them to hit me?" "Do you want them...*

**BOX 3.1: Observations at a PRONOEI and CEIs**

The *Young Lives* qualitative research team visited a CEI in Rioja, one of *Young Lives* rural sites in the Upper Amazon. Not far from this community, there was a PRONOEI located in a smaller community. In the photographs on page 32 it is possible to see the striking differences between these two services, located in the same region. The team also visited a CEI in Andahuaylas, another *Young Lives* site in the Andes. Differences are marked and immediately visible: whilst both CEIs have solid buildings with ample classrooms, enough furniture and a friendly and attractive environment, the PRONOEI is a one-room cabin with some adult sized tables (at that point in need of repair), with no permanent displays, few educational materials and old and inadequate furniture.

*to crack my head open?*” Six months later, Hugo rejoined the same pre-school and was planning to start primary school after one more year.

While this is a very specific incident, the family’s response illustrates the situation of parents in rural communities who cannot choose another pre-school when things go wrong. They may opt to put their child’s education on hold, whilst families in urban areas facing a similar problem might look for other alternatives to continue their child’s education.

Despite these constraints, Hugo’s family does recognise pre-school as bringing some benefits. His mother thinks pre-school helps children in their transition to first grade as they learn “the vowels and the alphabet” and also get “their little hands more adapted for writing”; thus, “they suffer less when in primary school”. At the same time, sending their children to pre-school can also have benefits for family life in rural communities, providing safe care for children while their parents are working in the fields. As Hugo’s mother put it “...*I could leave him there [while I go to the farm] and by the time they*

*finish class I’m back here*”. Before Hugo attended pre-school, she would have had to take her children with her to the fields, since no early childhood care is available.

For many children, pre-school represents their first contact with the world beyond their immediate household, and all the challenges this implies. Both parents and children are aware of the differences between pre-school and primary school settings. Based on their own experiences or the experiences of people close to them, they form their own expectations and even fears. For example, although Hugo’s mother thinks starting primary school is an important moment for her son she also believes “he’s going to suffer a little bit”. She explained that this may last until he:

“...gets adapted, knows his teachers, and pupils, because here not all children go to primary school...sometimes they are transferred from other places and there are always strange children in the classroom. He’s going to suffer a bit...But, depending on how well the teacher and schoolmates

treat him he will get used to it...He'll get used to study and will learn there."

The hidden cost of pre-school and its organisational separateness from primary school were identified earlier as major issues facing parents as they enrol their children, especially in rural areas. The case of Carmen highlights other reasons why some children are not enrolled in pre-school. Carmen's mother explained that her daughter was not attending because the nearest pre-school facility was too far from where they live. Although it is only 15 minutes walk, Carmen would need to walk along the *Carretera Marginal de la Selva* (Jungle Border Highway), a busy road that extends 1,688 kilometres from Amazonas to Junin region. Carmen's mother did not want to put her little daughter at risk by allowing her to walk alone to pre-school, and it wasn't practical to accompany her on both journeys. The main problem seems to be the starting time in pre-school, which is nearly one hour later than primary school (9am against 8am in primary schools). Families in rural areas normally walk long distances to their fields, and need to come back before the sun sets. For this reason, they need to be in the fields as early as possible to make the most of the day. If Carmen's mother takes her daughter to pre-school for 9am it will affect her work in the fields as she will "lose a lot of time". Carmen's older sister cannot walk her either, because she needs to be at the secondary school by 8am. This highlights the need for early education centres to adapt and become more relevant, particularly for families in rural areas. Despite all this, Carmen's family has found a way to overcome these difficulties; they are to some extent home school-

ing Carmen. They make her learn and practice the alphabets and give her daily homework. Her mum says they are doing this so that Carmen "would not suffer when she starts primary school". Carmen certainly seems optimistic:

INTERVIEWER – What would you like to happen next year?

CARMEN – Going to school  
[...]

INTERVIEWER – What do you think first grade is going to be like?

CARMEN – Nice

INTERVIEWER – Why do you think first grade is going to be nice?

CARMEN – I'm going to paint, draw and do homework

### **Lupe and Eva: early education in an urban community**

Lupe and Eva are both growing up in one of the oldest shantytowns in the capital city, called 'Lima 3' in this study. This district is not among the poorest in the city, and basic services such as water and electricity, schools, hospitals and public transportation are available for most people. However, families in this area experience other difficulties, such as living in overcrowded households and high levels of unemployment, criminality and insecurity. Lupe attended pre-school from an early age (3 years) and she had already transferred from pre-school to primary classes in the government school when initial qualitative fieldwork began in 2007. Eva, on the other hand, had been transferred from government pre-school to a private primary school that is closer to her home.

Lupe's parents value education as a stepping stone to a better life. They would like her to become a professional, may be a teacher, midwife or doctor. Lupe's story illustrates the many different experiences and feelings that both parents and children go through while making the transition to primary school, a far from straightforward process. In fact, it involves active adaptation by both parents and children. For example, while in pre-school, Lupe was surrounded by children of her own age, because the two buildings were independent although located within the same compound. Now that she is in first grade, her parents are concerned about her spending time alone with older children during break time and in the toilets, and with boys in particular. Another issue was the suitability of the playground for young children because it is used by other children. The following quote from Lupe's mother illustrates the fears that some parents experience when their child is changing schools:

"it's like she's on her own, not like in pre-school, it's completely. In pre-school they also take care of her, they look after her. Here [in primary school] they don't, here the teacher stays in the classroom, she looks at them for a while but then all the children are together in the schoolyard. Then she [Lupe] could tumble and fall, she might be pushed and hit...so many things can happen during the break time."

The differences between pre-school and primary school are related not only to the physical environment, but also to the teaching philosophy and practice in the classroom. For example,

Lupe associated first grade with an "assembly", which represents an adult place where important decisions are discussed in a fairly tense atmosphere. The world of early childhood play and imagination is at an end; they have entered a more adult world. In this regard, Lupe associated the beginning of primary school with the "end of holidays", buying new school-related materials, and having a "bigger school bag", which may symbolise the fact that she has more things to do now, more rules to follow and more responsibilities to fulfil.

Parents and teachers also perceive primary school as a more strict and rigorous place where children should learn to "behave properly", "work independently", "follow instructions" and "respect others". The main problem is that all these actions are seen to be associated with tougher discipline. According to one of the teachers, children who join first grade often say to her:

"Miss, next year we're going to have a mean teacher who is going to hit us with a ruler", or "we're going to school...there they're going to pull our ears".

Transitions are not only relevant as children enter school, but throughout the entire cycle of education. This was made clear by Lupe who highlighted the need for support to help her face new circumstances when she starts second grade.

LUPE – I wonder how is it going to be when I'm seven...

INTERVIEWER – What grade would you be in when you are seven?



LUPE – Second grade.

INTERVIEWER – And has anyone told you what second grade will be like?

LUPE – No....I wonder how would it be...

INTERVIEWER – And what do think?

LUPE – Well, second grade...I would need to put more effort in it.

INTERVIEWER – Put more effort? Into what?

LUPE – My homework.

INTERVIEWER – Your homework? Do you think it is going to be more difficult?

LUPE – Yes. More difficult than first grade.

INTERVIEWER – And is first grade more difficult than pre-school?

LUPE – Yes....A little bit

INTERVIEWER – What is going to be the most difficult thing?

LUPE – Difficult?...Not to fall behind.

In short, one of the main messages arising from the case studies is the need for better coordination between pre-school and primary school systems. Most of the teachers interviewed agreed that better links between them would help children and their caregivers in the transitions. At present, when children go to first grade they only bring their pre-school enrolment form. There is no exchange of information about children's adaptation process, learning skills, or any other facts. Everything starts from scratch. ECCE in Peru appears to be facing the same challenges that have been confronted by education systems throughout the world, with a few notable exceptions. There is little evidence from this data of a 'strong and equal partnership' between sectors (OECD 2001; 2006), planned with the child's interests as the

primary focus. Indeed the research teams' provisional conclusions are that:

“(i) Transition from pre-school to first grade is not understood and structured as a process within and between educational institutions; (ii) Parents have an overall positive attitude towards education but little information on transitions. In this context, the main burden of adaptation rests on children, who show a positive attitude and abilities to cope with it. However, this is not necessarily easy for them and causes some stress.”

(Ames et al. 2009.)

The case of Eva, on the other hand, highlights a different problem in early childhood education in Peru: the current private–public divide and differences in the quality of education between the two sectors. As mentioned in the policy context section, private provision has increased rapidly in the past few decades and more children, including those from the poorest households, are attending private schools in the hope of getting a better education. For example, Eva's mother strongly believes that her daughter will get a better education in her current private school, and more importantly, she will study in a safer environment:

EVA'S MOTHER – This is why I don't like the [government] schools

INTERVIEWER – Because they pull the [children's] hair?

EVA'S MOTHER – Yes, they hit them. They do what they want, they don't teach them... That's how they used to discipline children

before, but I don't agree with that. I always tell my children's teachers "don't pull their hair and don't hit them..."

Eva also agreed that one of the things she did not like about the government pre-school was that her teacher used to hit children when they did not behave properly. "I finished the puzzle quickly so that they [teachers] would not hit me", she said. Both children and parents are aware of the low quality of education in most government schools and those who can afford it are turning to private education, even when this involves a large investment. The problem in Peru is that paying for education does not necessarily guarantee a better quality education, as Eva herself pointed out, comparing her government pre-school teacher with her experience in private primary school:

EVA – ... My pre-school teacher was nicer.

INTERVIEWER – Why was she nicer?

EVA – Because she helped us.

INTERVIEWER – And she [first grade teacher] does not help you?

EVA – No...

INTERVIEWER – What does she do?

EVA – Only her own work...

INTERVIEWER – How come she only does her own work?

EVA – Her own work and then she leaves us because she needs to go to another school.

Even at a very young age, Eva is aware of her teacher's other commitments and the way these affect the quality of her education. She complains about the little time and attention given

by the teacher who "has other students". Eva said she would like her teacher to spend more time with her and her friends in school.

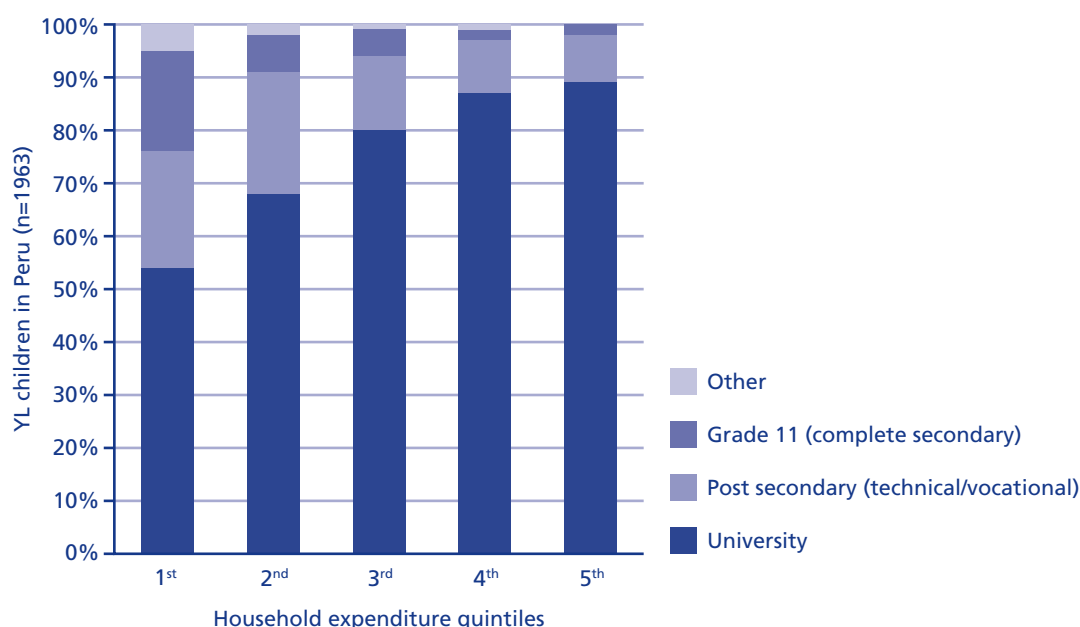
## Early transitions and long-term expectations

Looking further along the educational pathway for children like Lupe, Hugo and Carmen, *Young Lives* survey data suggests parents in Peru have high expectations for their children, but that expectations beyond basic secondary education (11<sup>th</sup> grade) are clearly linked to poverty levels, as indicated by Figure 3.7.

The 'least poor' families showed higher expectations for their children's educational achievements; 88% expected their children to complete university education, while only a minority wanted their children to finish Grade 11 (1.5%) or vocational training (8.9%). In contrast, 53% of the 'poorest' expected their children to get university education, 18% wished their children to finish secondary school (Grade 11), and 22% to complete vocational training. Expectations regarding early dropout also follow the same clear poverty-linked pattern.

There is no evidence that these expectations for children in Peru are strongly differentiated by gender. However, evidence from the qualitative research suggests that educational experiences and long-term expectations may vary according to gender in more subtle ways. For example, Hugo's mother said that as long as they have enough "money to support him" he will continue studying. She made explicit that this is

Figure 3.7. Caregivers' expectations of their child's educational achievement by poverty levels – Peru



“because he’s a boy”, and that with girls it is different. They sometimes drop out of school early because they get “engaged” or “marry” at the age of thirteen or fourteen. Therefore, Hugo’s mother expects him to study for longer than his older sister. As she explains:

HUGO’S MOTHER – It depends on how my daughter behaves, because sometimes a girl cannot [study] that much. It is up to her...

INTERVIEWER – And if she doesn’t go to secondary school, what would she do?

HUGO’S MOTHER – If she’s not in secondary school, she will work on the farm

## Summary

- Peru has achieved near universal primary school enrolment, but also has one of the

the most serious problems of quality and student achievement in the region.

- Early education for children (less than 6 years old) has been an established part of the education system since the 1970s, with official statistics suggesting enrolment rates more than doubled to 68% between 1991 and 2006.
- The Government of Peru has played a major role in service development and is the major provider in rural and urban areas. The two major types of government provision (CEI and PRONOEI) are managed and resourced differently, introducing inequities in access and quality of provision. Lower resourced PRONOEIs are targeted mainly to poorer rural and marginal shanty communities.
- Private sector education has been expanding, with enrolments growing by 50% between 1993 and 2003, compared with only 18%

growth in the public sector. Meanwhile enrolment and attendance rates in PRONOEI are actually declining, despite being one of the major sources of ECCE available to disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

- When surveyed in 2006, 83.5% of *Young Lives* caregivers in Peru reported their 4 and 5-year-old children had attended pre-school at some point since the age of three. Gender differences in access were significant for rural areas (5% more boys) but not urban areas.
- Despite high overall participation rates, poverty levels are linked to pre-school access, with 29% of children from the poorest fifth of households having no early education experience, compared with only 4% of children from the least poor households.
- These poverty-linked access patterns are reproduced for both urban and rural samples and are accounted for mainly by the more advantaged groups accessing the private sector. Government provision is more equitably distributed, although *Young Lives* data is not able to differentiate CEI from PRONOEI provision.
- Other factors associated with lower access to ECCE include lower maternal education, minority ethnic group, disability and having no father present at home.
- Caregivers' quality judgements for government pre-school are similar across all poverty levels, with 70–75% judging the standard of care and education to be 'good' or 'excellent'. Quality ratings are more variable amongst private education users, with 90% from more advantaged circumstances judging their child's private pre-school to be 'good' or 'excellent', whereas around 75% of the poorest groups gave a 'good' rating, and none described their child's pre-school as 'excellent'.
- The case studies describing Hugo and Carmen highlight the challenges of ensuring effective ECCE even where services are available in a rural community. Problems of access can be a disincentive to regular attendance, and hidden costs for materials, food etc., discourage very poor families.
- Pre-school education is organisationally separate from primary education in Peru, with weak communication and coordination, so the transition to school can be experienced as a challenge for children and an anxious time for their parents.
- The case study on Lupe reinforces evidence about the transition challenges for children living in shanty communities in urban Lima, despite having access to basic services, including government pre-schools, from an early age. The case study of Eva draws attention to decisions being made amongst families with sufficient resources to place their child in private school, where they perceive educational quality and prospects will be enhanced.
- Caregivers' educational aspirations for 5- and 6-year-old children in Peru are relatively high, with over 50% of the poorest families aspiring for their children to at least complete secondary education, and most of the remainder aspiring for technical or higher education. These aspirations are poverty linked, with only 1% of the most advantaged caregivers expecting their child to leave school at the end of the secondary cycle, and 88% anticipating university attendance.



## Chapter 4: Early childhood and primary education in India (Andhra Pradesh)

### Policy context

#### *Primary education*

India planned to achieve the goal of universal primary education up to age 14 by 1960. Nearly 50 years later, the final goal remains elusive, although India has seen a 5% increase in enrolments in primary schools between 1999 (110 million children) and 2005 (146 million) (UNESCO 2007). Universal primary education is now close to being achieved (the net enrolment rate was 89% in 2005) (UNESCO 2007). In the state of Andhra Pradesh (where *Young Lives* research is based), overall enrolment in primary schools during 2006/07 was 73%. In a context of rapid economic change, where parents' education levels are higher than in previous generations, parents recognise the potential of education to alter their children's fortunes and they actively seek ways to boost their children's chances through early childhood and primary education. While government

schools are the main provision in rural areas, parents are increasingly faced with a choice of schools for their children in urban areas, mainly due to a large and growing private sector, and a major debate around language of instruction. This chapter draws attention to the consequent diversity in transition experiences and inequities in both access to and quality of education.

In Andhra Pradesh, the Department of School Education is responsible for classes I to X. Among other things, it aims to: provide access to primary education for all children aged 5–15 years; ensure children do not drop out early; maintain quality standards in education within the State; ensure community participation in strengthening the school education system; and provide free mid-day meals to all children in government schools, and free textbooks to all children of classes I to V, and all children of classes VI to X belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC), Backward Classes (BC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Scheduled Castes (SCs) are the lowest in the traditional caste structure and formerly labelled as the 'untouchables'. In rural Andhra Pradesh, SC communities are located separately, and in most cases away from the main villages. These communities are named after the caste and even in the official records are often called harijana wada. They have been subjected to discrimination for years and therefore lack access to basic services, including education. National legislation aims to prohibit untouchability and discrimination. A 15% reservation has been provided for the SCs in education including colleges and universities, and government employment. Separate boarding hostels are provided for SC boys and girls to attend school and scholarships to promote higher education.

Backward classes (BCs) are people belonging to a group of low-level castes. In Andhra Pradesh, the BCs are further divided into four groups (ABCD). Recently, the High Court has ordered the inclusion of a fifth sub-group, E, and Muslims have been placed into this category. A 25% reservation has been provided to the BCs for purposes of education and government employment. The division of reservation among the sub groups is in relation to the proportion in the overall population; e.g. 7% for BC-A, 10% for BC-B and so on. Separate boarding hostels, scholarships, etc. are provided to promote education for these groups, as for the SCs.

Scheduled Tribes (STs) are the indigenous people who live in and depend on the forests. Different groups of tribes live in different parts of Andhra Pradesh and vary in their culture, language and lifestyles. Although a good number of them are mainstreamed and live in >

While primary education enrolment rates have improved, the quality of education in Andhra Pradesh primary schools is highly variable, as in much of the rest of the country. A recent study carried out in 11 developing countries found that India's primary schools are amongst the worst-equipped (Zhang et al. 2008). Moreover, an assessment exercise in India and Pakistan found that over two-thirds of pupils at grade 3 level were unable to write a simple sentence in Urdu (UNESCO 2008). In 2001, the Government of India launched its flagship programme *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), which aims to achieve universal primary education of satisfactory quality by 2010. In particular, SSA realises the importance of ECCE since it regards the 0–14 years age range as a continuum (see [www.ssa.nic.in/](http://www.ssa.nic.in/)). Within Andhra Pradesh, SSA functions as an independent unit of the Department of School Education, encompassing early childhood as well as primary education (Vennam et al. 2009).

Although government schools are the major providers of primary education, India has witnessed very rapid growth in private schools (Muralidharan and Kremer 2006). According to Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2008), this growth has occurred largely at the expense of government school enrolments and has contributed little to overall enrolment.

According to State government data, over a third (36%) of the total children in Andhra Pradesh enrolled in a primary school attended a private school (both aided and unaided) in 2006/7. The remaining 64% attended various types of government schools (state government schools 5.5%, municipal schools 2.8%, and local government schools 55%) ([www.ssa.ap.nic.in](http://www.ssa.ap.nic.in)).

One of the major attractions of the private sector is that English is usually offered as the medium of instruction rather than the State language, Telugu. This is especially true for high schools, but the pattern percolates down through the primary sector. So for example, English is the medium of instruction in only 1.6% of government high schools, but in 62% of private high schools. Most of the private English-medium schools are located in the urban areas, thereby restricting access to poor children from rural and tribal areas. As we shall see, access to private education is strongly poverty-linked, but even so, many parents from the poorest communities are opting to enrol their children in private schools, including at kindergarten age. The burden of cost is substantial, and grows as children progress through primary and especially into high school. The overall consequence is that the trend for migration to the private sector for the early classes is in part balanced by a counter-trend for the

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*> the plains areas, a sizeable number continue to live in isolated hill areas and have little access to services. Areas with high tribal populations are covered by a special administrative system through the establishment of the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA). Special provisions are made to promote education, health and sustainable livelihoods through the ITDAs. A 7% reservation is provided in educational institutions and government employment. Provision of boarding hostels for boys and girls to attend school, scholarships, training for jobs and job placements are some of the special services available to them.*

poorest families to transfer their children back into government schools as costs escalate. The consequence for children is inevitable disruption to their educational experience, and discontinuity in learning, especially where they are shifting from Telugu to English and back to Telugu as the medium of instruction.

Faced with the trend to English-medium private schools, The Principal Secretary of School Education made a newspaper statement saying that it is vital for these children to have access to English-medium schools in view of the fast-changing economy and the growing number of employment opportunities in the private sector (Vennam et al. forthcoming). In this context, the Government of Andhra Pradesh introduced the World Bank-aided *Strengthening and Universalisation of Quality and Access to Secondary Schools* (SUCCESS) project during 2008/9. The department issued an order introducing English as the medium of instruction within the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) syllabus from class VI in 6,500 schools, covering over 250,000 students. Under the order, students in classes VI and VII of upper primary schools which are within a 2 km radius of high schools where English would be introduced as medium of teaching would be shifted to the nearby high schools along with teachers and other administrative staff. The authorities have also made arrangements to train teachers who are currently teaching a Telugu-medium syllabus. They undergo training in English at reputed universities and institutes in the country. The government's move to introduce English as the main medium of instruction has

been welcomed by the teaching community and students. However, introduction of the CBSE syllabus is controversial. The Andhra Pradesh United Teachers Federation (UTF) and the Andhra Pradesh Teachers Federation (APTF) have opposed the move to introduce the CBSE syllabus and want the government to continue with the state syllabus. They also fear that the merger of schools would result in closure of many schools in rural areas. The Joint Action Committee of Teachers Organisations has even launched protests against the merger of schools (Vennam et al 2009).

### **Early childhood education**

Andhra Pradesh has a long-established early childhood education system based on *anganwadi* centres (literally 'courtyard shelter' in Hindi), established under the umbrella of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The world's largest national early childhood programme in terms of children enrolled, ICDS was formed with an ambitious 1974 policy:

“to provide adequate services to children, both before and after birth and through the period of growth to ensure their full physical, mental and social development...so that within a reasonable time all children in the country enjoy optimum conditions for their balanced growth.”

(Government of India 1974)

Officially launched in 1975, ICDS was conceived as a comprehensive early childhood intervention (on a model influenced by *HeadStart* in USA), including immunisation, growth monitoring,



health and referral services as well as pre-school education. However, its effectiveness is still undermined by problems in targeting and quality. The ICDS is intended to provide services for all young children, but according to recent studies, older children (aged 3–6 years) participate much more fully in ICDS programmes than those aged under 3 years. It is the youngest who are most at risk from poor nutrition and stunting, yet the programme still fails to cover many children from the poorest households, neither does it preferentially target girls and children from lower castes (Gagnolati et al. 2006; Deaton and Drèze 2008).

ICDS depends largely on individual States for implementation through a network of *anganwadi* centres in both urban and rural areas. The quality of provision depends mainly on the skills and commitment of the individual ‘*anganwadi* worker’ who along with the designated ‘*anganwadi* helper’ are responsible for most aspects of management, enrolment of children and the daily programme. *Anganwadi* workers are mostly married women from within the community who have completed basic secondary education (up to Class X) and have received some training on working with young children. In contrast, more than 50% of *anganwadi* helpers are either uneducated or have received only basic primary schooling (up to class IV) (CIRCUS 2006).

The funding base for *anganwadis* is very modest indeed. For example, as little as Rs150 (approximately US\$3) per month was made available to rural *anganwadis* to cover rental of premises in 2004/5. Very often, these premises are available

only on a sessional basis, and other groups may take priority over the *anganwadi*. Moreover, central government provides Rs1000 (approximately US\$20, and below the legal minimum wage in many States) per month to cover the honorarium received by *anganwadi* workers, with individual State governments in principle responsible for ‘topping up’ wages, but in practice varying in the support given, and with payments frequently delayed. This low core funding base reflects the initial vision of a community service provided on a semi-voluntary basis, but the consequence is significantly variable quality, which is in turn strongly dependant on the priority given by individual States to active social policy and effective public services. Even the Supplementary Nutrition Programme – in some ways the ICDS mainstay service, ensuring all young children receive a hot meal at the *anganwadi* – is not delivered consistently.

One of the achievements of ICDS is its wide availability, which includes remote rural areas. Even so, access is still an issue in tribal (ST) areas. The small size and distant location of the tribal villages makes it difficult to provide education services. In spite of having one centre per 700 people in tribal areas (compared with the normal ratio of one centre per 1000), a good number of tribal areas still have no access to the service. In view of this situation and in response to a supreme court ruling in 1993 affirming the right to education is a fundamental right, the government has now introduced ‘mini *anganwadis*’ in these areas (Vennam et al. 2009).

The goal of providing pre-school education includes a play-based learning environment to promote overall development, and preparing

children for primary school. This education goal is one of the most difficult to provide – and least consistently delivered – according to a 2004 survey of six Indian States.

Acknowledging the huge variation between states, the authors conclude:

“Pre-school education is in high demand, especially in areas where parents are relatively well educated. However, the development needs of young children are poorly understood by communities.”

(CIRCUS 2006)

The same authors go on to cite lack of space, infrastructure and basic facilities, lack of educational materials and appropriate training for *anganwadi* workers. In another report about ECCE programmes, Parijat Sarkar from Movement for Alternatives and Youth Awareness (MAYA) in India noted:

“Quality of the *anganwadis* is inconsistent: infrastructure can be poor, with lack of adequate kitchens or toilets, or children may be excluded on the basis of caste, or effectively excluded by the requirement to use only the official state language in *anganwadis* regardless of what the children speak at home.”

(BvLF 2007)

However, *anganwadis* remain the only pre-school option available to most parents in the rural and tribal areas, despite functioning with only minimum resource allocations and low remuneration to the *anganwadi* worker and the helper. It is important to emphasise the variability of *anganwadi* provision, even within

the same district, which indicates that local factors are also shaping quality. *Young Lives* fieldwork draws attention to constraints due to suitability of buildings, accessibility of play and educational materials and the level of community involvement (Vennam et al. 2009). The attitude of *anganwadi* workers and the priority they give to work with the children in the *anganwadi* alongside other forms of income-generation appear to have the greatest impact on the hours the *anganwadi* is open, and on the level of service provided (See Box 4.1).



*Anganwadi building in rural Poompuhar*

The variable quality in *anganwadis*, especially the weakness in pre-school education, combined with increasing parental aspirations, especially for English-medium education, is having a significant impact on educational provision and school choice in the early years. Once again, this favours the private sector, not

**BOX 4.1: Observations at two *anganwadis***

*Young Lives* teams in India visited many *anganwadis* during their fieldwork and highlighted many variations in quality. Two contrasting reports are summarised here from the same rural area in Andhra Pradesh.

*Anganwadi* 1 is in the village called 'Poompuhar' in this report, which is one of the four major sites for qualitative research. It is one of two *anganwadis* in the village, neither of which appeared to function very effectively. *Anganwadi* 1 is centrally located in the village but has no building of its own. It functions as the *panchayat* (village council) office, which is one long hall with all sorts of community materials stored at each end, making it an inadequate space for children. All learning and play material are "safely" kept at the *anganwadi* worker's house as she does not want children to "break" or "spoil them". Observations made during the fieldwork suggest that the *anganwadi* worker attends only every now and then, leaving all the responsibility to the *ayah* (*anganwadi* helper). The *ayah* appeared to spend most of her time guarding children at the entrance of the *anganwadi*. At about 12.30pm she distributed the 'flour', which is provided as a nutritional supplement within the ICDS programme, after which the children went home. Every time a meeting took place at the *panchayat* office, the children were moved to the enclosed verandah or sent home. On 40% of the days that the team was at this village, meetings were held at the *panchayat* office for at least an hour in the morning. According to the *anganwadi* worker, there are 30 children officially attending the centre, however, the *Young Lives* team observed only 10 children on any one day. Observations also revealed that the *anganwadi* worker did not regularly record attendance, which clearly suggests that there is no fixed list of enrolled children. Only a few children attend on a regular basis, while the others pop in and out, mainly for the nutritional supplement.

*Anganwadi* 2 is very different. It is in a nearby village to Poompuhar and serves a similar community, but much more effectively. The *anganwadi* is located in one of the rooms in the primary school. It is open regularly, and both the *anganwadi* worker and *ayah* attend and put in efforts to bring children into the centre. While the *anganwadi* room is much smaller than in *anganwadi* 1, its location within the primary school has significant advantages. For example, the *anganwadi* worker interacts regularly with the primary school teachers and they work as one unit. According to the primary school teachers interviewed, locating the *anganwadi* in the primary school premises not only builds institutional linkages but also helps to increase attendance rates at the pre-school, primary and high school, since it frees older children from having to undertake sibling care.

just for traditional elite groups. Many private schools are springing up in relatively poor communities, demanding relatively low fees and offering what observers may judge to be relatively low quality, but strongly academic skills-focused instruction, which nonetheless is a very attractive option for high-aspiring parents faced with limited choices for their children.

These trends in early childhood and primary education raise several key questions for Andhra Pradesh:

1. What is the pattern of use of private-versus government-run early education programmes in rural and urban areas for girls as well as boys?
2. How far are parental choices related to relative poverty and wealth, and what other characteristics of households and young children are linked to their early experiences of education?
3. What is the implication for children's educational trajectories and, looking ahead, what are the likely outcomes of parental choices between the government and private sector?

### **Who goes to pre-school? Access, equity and quality**

In Andhra Pradesh, 86.9% of the sample (1,694 children) were reported by their care-givers as having attended a pre-school of some kind, at some time since the age of 3 years. Attendance rates are almost as high for rural as for urban samples (86 versus 90%). There is a slight difference in favour of boys (with 87%

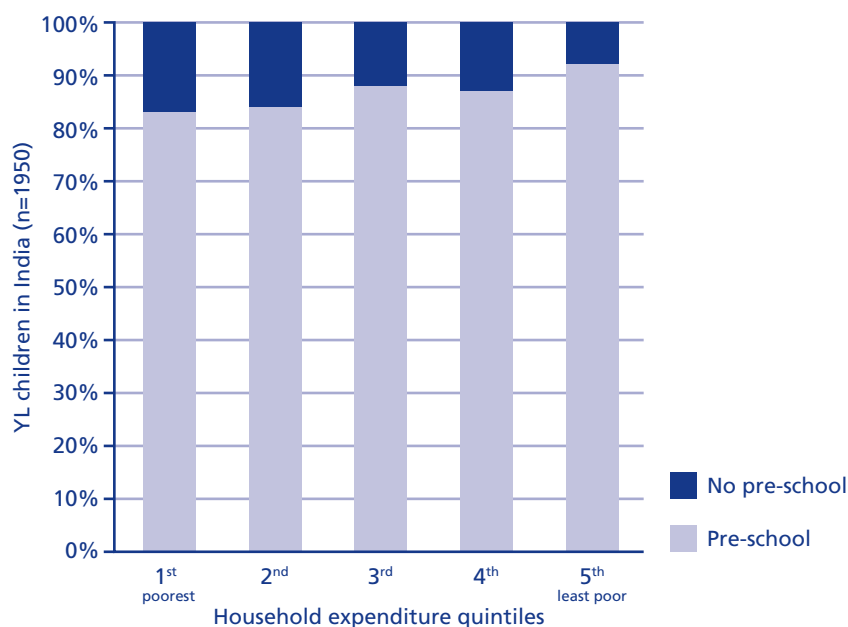
having pre-school experience compared to 86.9% of girls), although these differences, in both rural and urban areas, are not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). While gender equity is being achieved in terms of overall access, analyses reported below point to more subtle and widening gender differentiation, beginning with the choice of type of schooling.

Figure 4.1 divides the sample into five quintiles (groups of equal size) according to per capita household expenditure, as for Ethiopia and Peru. Levels of reported attendance are high and distributed across all poverty groups with only a slight trend for higher enrolment rates amongst more advantaged groups.

However, once again, the overall patterns tell only part of the story. In particular, they do not distinguish between the different types of service available for pre-school-age children and their families, notably *anganwadis* funded under the government ICDS scheme, and kindergarten classes within private schools. These distinctions were included in two survey questions. Parents were asked: "who runs this pre-school...is it private, NGO, public, etc?" They were also asked about payments made in money or in kind.

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 are based on separate analyses for rural versus urban sites, in each case showing the links between poverty levels (measured by per capita household expenditure data, as above) and type of pre-school attended. Figure 4.2 highlights the continuing significance of public provision (*anganwadis*) for children

*Figure 4.1. Pre-school attendance since the age of 3 years by poverty levels – Andhra Pradesh*



in rural communities, especially those from the poorest households. Private pre-schools are an option for only some more advantaged groups, accounting for 31.1% of the children in the 'least poor' group. These figures represent reported use of public versus private services in rural areas, however, many rural families do not have a choice between public versus private education, since few private schools are located in rural areas, and distances to the nearest private school may be considerable. Even so, private schools are present in increasing numbers of rural communities (as elaborated in case studies below).

In urban communities, parents do have a choice, and the private sector plays a significant role in provision of pre-school education (Figure 4.3). Not surprisingly, poverty levels are

strongly predictive of whether children attend a public or private pre-school. Private pre-schools account for 78.4% of children in the 4<sup>th</sup> expenditure quintile and 87.6% of children in the 5<sup>th</sup> expenditure quintile (least poor groups), with only 15.5% and 4.8% children from these groups respectively attending public pre-school. In contrast, only 34.1% of the 'poorest' urban group attend a private pre-school, while more than 45.5% of 'poorest' children attend public pre-schools. While these contrasts are predictable, it is striking that one third of the poorest households report opting for private education. It is also interesting to note that gender is not a significant factor affecting early education choice between private and public pre-schools for urban sites, whereas in rural sites girls are less likely than boys to attend private kindergartens (13 versus 18%), and more likely to

Figure 4.2. Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels – rural sample in Andhra Pradesh

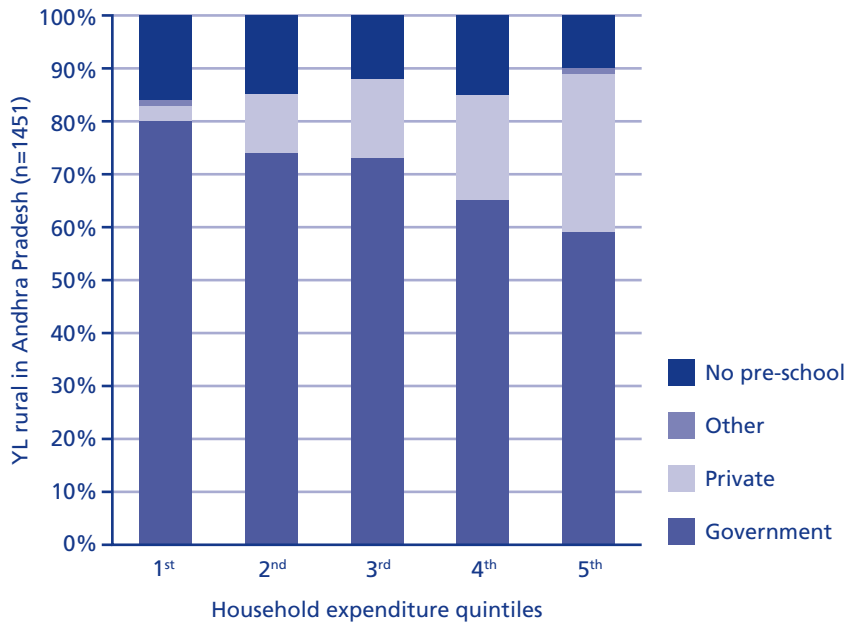
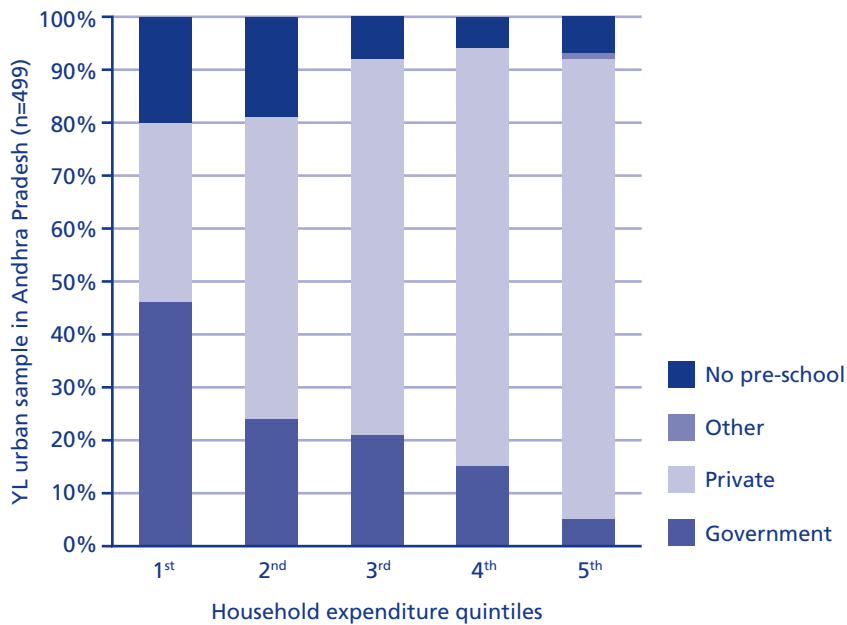


Figure 4.3. Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels – urban sample in Andhra Pradesh



attend public pre-schools (73 versus 68%). Gender differences become more significant for later stages of education, again especially for children growing up in rural areas (see below).

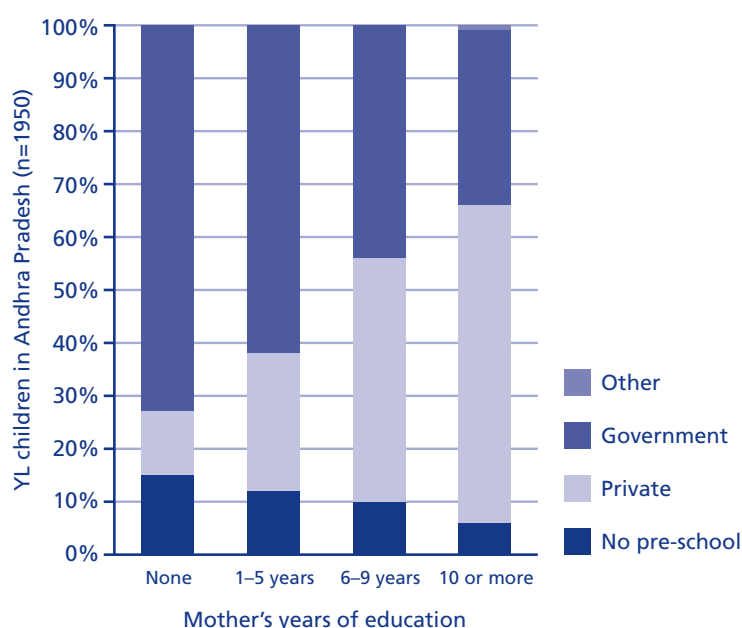
These urban versus rural patterns echo the link between maternal educational levels and pre-school attendance. Mothers' education (measured in years completed) is strongly predictive of preference for private versus public services, especially in urban areas (Figure 4.4).

*Young Lives* survey data identifies a trend for parents to move their child from the public to the private sector even during the pre-school years. In Andhra Pradesh, 123 caregivers (out of the 2011 interviewed) reported that their child had attended more than one pre-school since the age of 3 years. In the great majority of cases (101) the caregiver reported moving the child from a public

pre-school to a private class. The same trend was also reported for Peru (see Chapter 3).

While gender does not appear to be a significant factor shaping educational opportunities at this early stage, analysis of choices for private versus public pre-schools reveals more subtle differentiation. Overall, girls are more likely to be educated within the government sector and are expected to leave school earlier than boys. Evidence for these different trajectories comes from the *Young Lives* older cohort (12-year-olds), with 10% more boys enrolled in private schools and 68% of boys anticipating university education, compared with 54% of girls interviewed. Only 42% of girls' caregivers expected their daughters to progress to university. The findings reported so far relate to caregivers' reports on their children's experience of pre-school since the age of 3 (surveyed in 2006).

**Figure 4.4. Pre-school attendance by mother's education level – Andhra Pradesh**





Caregivers were also asked if their children had started primary school. A surprising 44% of children were reported to have started school, even though only 20% of the sample had reached 5 years old, the age at which children in Andhra Pradesh become eligible to enrol in primary education. Also, the poorest households were most likely to have enrolled their children in primary school, with 54% already attending compared with only 33% of the less poor households (Galab et al. 2008). In part, this reflects the practice of earlier admission to government schools, whereas children in the private sector would still be in kindergarten at this age. The attraction to the poorest families is likely to be shaped by the provision of free mid-day meals in government schools (Drèze and Goyal 2003; Singh 2008). Additional analyses confirm the significance of pre-school choices as a gateway into diverging long term trajectories. Half the children in government pre-schools were expected by their parents to transfer to government primary schools (or had already transferred), while 27% were expected to transfer from private kindergartens into private schools. As we have already seen, these trajectories are linked strongly to poverty levels. But they are also linked to intra-household inequities, with boys and first-born children more likely to be selected for a private trajectory.

Next we turn to caregiver's assessments of the quality of early education. As for the sample in Ethiopia and Peru (see Chapters 2 and 3), caregivers participating in *Young Lives* were asked: "In your opinion, how good is the quality of the care and teaching at this pre-school?"

Figures 4.5 and 4.6 analyse parents' judgements of quality in relation to household poverty levels for government and private pre-schools. The findings for government provision are similar to those for Peru, with a wide distribution in quality judgements from 'excellent' to 'bad', but little variation between poverty groups. Concerns about the quality of *anganwadis* expressed at the beginning of this section are confirmed in these statistics with less than half of caregivers judging their child's pre-school to be 'good' or 'excellent' (very few using the 'excellent' category). Conversely, between 5 and 12% judge the service to be 'bad' or 'extremely bad'. There is little variation between poverty groups, with the vast majority judging their child's pre-school to be either 'good' or 'reasonably okay' (Figure 4.5).

Users of private pre-schools are overall much more satisfied with their child's care and education, with over 70% judging it to be 'good' or 'excellent', and over 10% reporting 'excellent' in most groups. The pattern is slightly different for the poorest groups, with very consistent levels of quality satisfaction ('good' according to over 90%) and few extreme judgements compared with more advantaged groups (Figure 4.6).

In summary, survey data suggests early pre-school and school experience is very much the norm amongst young children in Andhra Pradesh but there is evidence of early differentiation in specific educational trajectories. These patterns are strongly shaped by where children live (urban versus rural), by household poverty levels, caste status, gender and by levels



Figure 4.5. Caregivers' perceptions of quality in government pre-schools by poverty levels – Andhra Pradesh

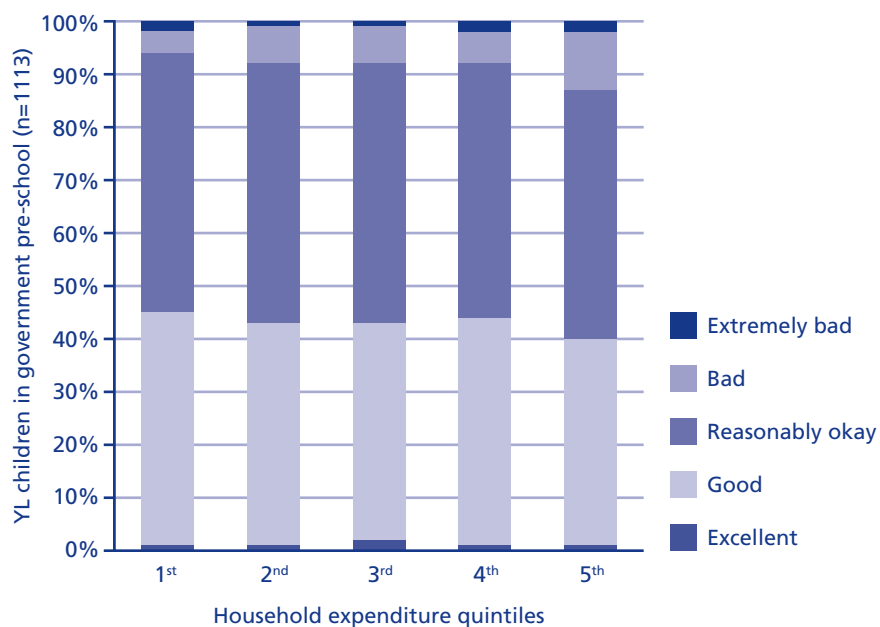
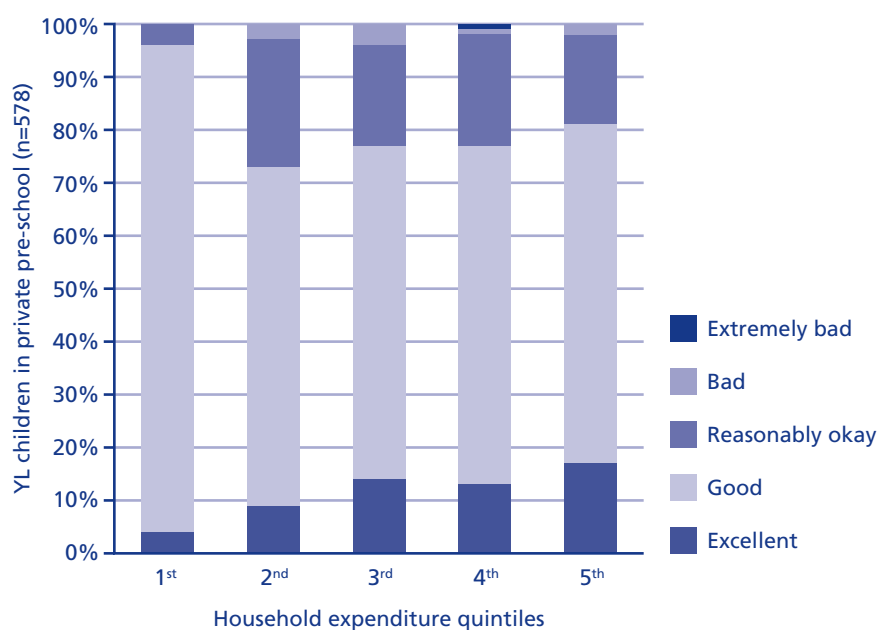


Figure 4.6. Caregivers' perceptions of quality in private pre-schools by poverty levels – Andhra Pradesh



of maternal education. Emergence of private education is a major feature, with judgements of relative quality confirming parental preferences. The same caution applies to interpreting quality data as was discussed for Ethiopia and Peru, in the absence of independent indicators of pre-school quality. However, evidence from qualitative research certainly confirms these overall findings, especially the dissatisfaction with government services and preference for the quality offered in private kindergartens.

### **Experiences of early transitions in Andhra Pradesh**

More detailed evidence on these issues is being provided by longitudinal qualitative research carried out by the *Young Lives* team in four sites: one urban, two rural and one tribal (see Chapter 1 for details of sampling and methods). A sub-sample of 24 younger cohort children is being studied in detail. When the children and their caregivers were interviewed in 2007, half of the group (12 children) had attended a public pre-school (*anganwadi*) and then made the transition to a public primary school. Most of the rest (10 children) were attending schools in the private sector, a favoured option especially for boys, with six boys and four girls attending private schools when first interviewed in 2007, although their pathways into private education varied, with six children (four boys and two girls) moving straight from home into private school (usually via private kindergarten classes) and four children (two boys and two girls) transferring from a public pre-school into the private sector (Vennam et al. 2009).

This section highlights the perspectives of young children, their caregivers and teachers in Andhra Pradesh, especially since these are linked to household circumstances, parents' aspirations for their children and beliefs about the merits of different educational trajectories. What is particularly evident in Andhra Pradesh is that an attitudinal shift has been taking place amongst parents, who increasingly see education as a key to improving their children's prospects and the status of their family, and as a way to break the poverty cycle. However, educational opportunities vary, as do the resources (and resourcefulness) of parents in making decisions about and supporting their children's education.

The two different trajectories are illustrated by contrasting the experiences of two children from the same rural community (called 'Poompuhar' in this paper). Both children attended government pre-schools but their early school careers are very different. Revanth is a boy attending a private primary school, while Shanmuka priya is a girl in government school. As the survey data makes clear, private schools are most widely available in urban centres, but they are also an increasingly significant option for parents in rural areas (Muralidharan and Kremer 2006). These two cases are complemented by that of Dilshad, a girl in an urban Muslim community called 'Polur', whose parents are putting effort into sending her to private primary school despite being among the poorest households in the *Young Lives* sample. These case studies also illustrate how parental expectations based on gender have important

implications for children's educational careers, but that there is also considerable diversity in the significance attached to gender in shaping children's lives.

***Shanmuka priya and Revanth: early education in a rural community***

Shanmuka priya and Revanth both live in Poompuhar, a village with a population of around 2,000, the majority of whom speak Telugu. This is a drought-prone district on an inland plain, where the poor face food shortages during June–August. The major occupations are agriculture (including live-stock-keeping) and daily wage labour. Children (mostly girls) are employed as seasonal workers in the cotton fields, missing school for around 2–3 months every year. In most cases children work in their families' fields (Morrow and Vennam 2008).

The community has two *anganwadis* of basic quality, (including *Anganwadi* 1 described in Box 4.1 on page 56). There is also a government primary school, located adjacent to the high school and in the same premises. Classes are conducted on the veranda due to lack of space and all age groups are taught by the same teacher.

At the age of 5 years, Shanmuka priya started to attend the village *anganwadi* (*Anganwadi* 1). In fact, another *anganwadi* is available closer to her home but it is used mainly by SC families, and her parents prefer her to be with non-SC children. In 2006, when she was still only 5 years old, Shanmuka priya entered the government primary school. Her parents recognise the potential for education to change their daughter's life. As

pointed out by her mother, they are less certain that their aspirations will be fulfilled in practice:

“...Only education is important for the present days. What is so good about agriculture? There is hardly anything left after working so hard. There are no proper rains and no good crops. I say only education is important; they can get some job and live happily...Our life is ‘waste’ now, isn’t it? [why do you think it’s a ‘waste’?] As we are not educated, how do we know? So there is no other option than cultivation [agriculture]. What else do we know?...only hard work. Our children should not be in hard work; [they] should be sent to school for a good life.”

Her mother is clear that one of the reasons for seeking early school admission was that the *anganwadi* was offering so little:

“There is no specific advantage [from attending the *anganwadi*]... They don’t teach at all...hence we have changed the school... She was sent to the school much earlier than the regular age, when she was less than 5 years of age”

In India, many children are starting school before the expected age, as noted earlier. According to Shanmuka priya's mother, her transition into primary school was not easy:

INTERVIEWER – Last year, you have enrolled her here in the primary school...? Did she go happily or did she cry? Was there any problem for her?



*Anganwadis can often only afford a low rent building*

SHANMUKA PRIYA'S MOTHER – It was a trouble for her...she used to say that “sirs [teachers] beat” and she felt troubled. We used to tell her some convincing stories and send her to school. She used to go crying and never happily because she did not like to go.

INTERVIEWER – Why did she feel like that?

SHANMUKA PRIYA'S MOTHER – I think it's because she had a joyful learning in *anganwadi*, but all of a sudden she was in a regular school. It is for longer period in the school...It was more relaxed there in the *anganwadi*, but here it is studying and writing. She can't sit at one place for long as she is so used to moving around. They make her sit here, in the classroom. Shanmuka priya cries for one reason or the other, but we sent her, though the problem continued.

Shanmuka priya's own view is rather different:

INTERVIEWER – Which school do you like, *anganwadi* or the present school [government primary school]?

SHANMUKA PRIYA – I like the present one only.

INTERVIEWER – Why?

SHANMUKA PRIYA – ...because ‘sirs’ [teachers] take care of us.

INTERVIEWER – During the days of your education in *anganwadi*, did you like it?

SHANMUKA PRIYA – I did not like it. Nobody is there. There is only one old lady [the *anganwadi* helper]. She serves food, and sends us off.

INTERVIEWER – Does the *anganwadi* teacher come?

SHANMUKA PRIYA – No, the teacher does not come. She [the helper] does not teach.

However, even though Shanmuka priya values her new school, she also says she does not like to go to school regularly because “my sir [teacher] beats me”. In fact from other comments by Shanmuka priya and her parents, it seems they are quite ambivalent about school, and fear of beatings is a theme:

SHANMUKA PRIYA'S MOTHER – she says that teachers beat her if she is late to school, hence wants to be on time. She is a little more responsible now. She goes again, but she does not attend the afternoon classes. Instead she goes to the *anganwadi* – she says that they don't beat her.

Beatings, teacher absenteeism and low commitment to children's learning are very frequent complaints from parents in the sample.

Moreover, parents having their children in state schools feel they cannot voice their opinions regarding their children's education.

INTERVIEWER – Did you ever speak to the teachers?

SHANMUKA PRIYA'S MOTHER – ...we tell them now and then but it is of no use. Sometimes, we go and tell them in the school. We also talk to the teacher from the village [*vidya* volunteer], but there is no use. The primary school is particularly bad...The headmaster for the primary school hardly comes to the school. As such the teachers do not take their job seriously. Even the local teachers do not go regularly. They keep doing other jobs.

Revanth's educational trajectory seems likely to be very different from Shanmuka priya's. He used to attend one of the village *anganwadis*, but his parents were disappointed with the poor quality:

"What is there. She [the *anganwadi* worker] doesn't know anything. She doesn't know which children are registered in the *anganwadi* and which are not...She comes to *anganwadi*, stays for some time with the children who turn up on that day, and then leaves. Sometimes she doesn't come. Only 'ayah' [the helper] manages....They don't even look after the children. If she comes that's it, they sit...and both of them talk with each other".

Initially, Revanth transferred to the same village primary school attended by Shanmuka priya,

but by then his parents already had a more ambitious plan for their son: to enrol him in a private school as soon as possible:

"...[The village primary school] is not at all good. In our village the teachers are not good. We just send them so that they get used to the routine of going to school...If he goes [to private school] and studies further he will become very wise, that is why we are sending him there. The teachers here are not teaching well".

Revanth is attending a private, English-medium school serving children in the surrounding 20 villages. The school has a hostel facility, therefore children are not required to travel long distances. There is a small playground with limited equipment, but facilities are better than those in the government school in the village.

Revanth proudly talks (in English) about what he has learned:

INTERVIEWER – What do they teach you?

REVANTH – A, B, C, D...Er...E, F, G...H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P [takes a deep breath] Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z.

INTERVIEWER – And what else do they teach you?

REVANTH – A.P.P.L.E. [He goes on to recite short poems, and numbers up to a hundred]

Although Revanth's family are amongst the 'less poor' in the *Young Lives* sample, paying for even low-cost private schooling is a very significant cost, but one they are willing to bear as an investment in their son's future:

“We are ready to spend; we want him to study well that is why we sent him there... There is no one [to help with payments]. Our parents don’t give. They gave all of us when we were constructing our houses, we don’t ask anyone. We take as debts. When we get grains, onions come etc. then we can go and pay...He should not do agriculture, that is why we are spending so much for his education. That means we will make him study, come what may!”

The costs of the private school for Revanth’s parents are Rs 9000 (185 US\$) per year. This includes the fee for education, the child’s stay and food. Other costs include textbooks (Rs 4–500 a year or 8–10 US\$), notebooks (Rs 10–15 each or around 0.30 US\$, minimum of 15 notebooks per year). Pens, pencils, slates and slate pencils have to be replaced whenever the child wears them out or loses them. Additional costs in private schools include about Rs 500 (10 US\$) per year for school uniform. By contrast, teachers in government schools manage with a slate and a notebook for each child, whilst textbooks are provided free of charge for SCs, STs and BCs.

When paying for private education, families have to make hard choices. Revanth’s family make their choices along traditional gender lines:

“Two of my girl children attend school in the village...We are not paying for them; they are here only [at the village school]...when-ever we go there [to visit Revanth’s private school], we have to buy notebooks for him...

When he is old enough, we will also send our younger son to the [private] school.”

Since the original interview with Revanth’s parents, the fee at this private school has been increased to Rs 12,500 (US\$ 256) per year due to inflation. Some parents have therefore shifted their children to another school and hostel where the fee is lower, at Rs 8500 (US\$ 174) per year, forcing another transition. The rising costs of schooling are a major factor that risks disrupting educational pathways for boys like Revanth, even when he is on a more privileged trajectory than his sisters. In the absence of government regulation, private schools are able to increase their fees without warning, and parents must struggle to pay those fees without being able to budget for future costs, which are largely unknown (Vennam et al. 2009).

### ***Dilshad: early education in an urban community***

Dilshad lives in ‘Polur’, a muslim community in the state capital Hyderabad. She is the youngest and the only daughter in the family, having eight older brothers. Her family is in the poorest quintile within the *Young Lives* sample. They live in a one-room rented house with few possessions. Her father is a rickshaw puller and her mother works as a servant. Both parents are illiterate. Dilshad’s brothers are all much older than her, and no longer in school, and her parents are keen to do the best they can for their youngest child’s education. Dilshad did not go to *anganwadi* school but briefly attended a government primary school, before they moved her to a private English-medium school.

According to her mother:

“In government school they do not teach properly like in private school. Children are enrolled there in government school because of the food facility [supplementary nutrition programme].”

Dilshad’s mother also complained that teachers in the government school used to beat the children. Dilshad is much happier in the private school, so much so that she often wakes up early, excited to go to school. But the costs are considerable, and the family will rely on the older sons’ income in the longer term:

DILSHAD’S MOTHER – “We have to pay Rs 80... for the last exam they charged Rs 165. They did not allow her (to attend) until it was paid.”

INTERVIEWER – “Now you are paying Rs 80, do you think it is costly?”

DILSHAD’S MOTHER – “We can pay it now. But when she goes to 3<sup>rd</sup> class, we don’t know what the fees will be. My children [older sons] say that they will pay the fees anyhow.”

Dilshad’s mother went on to explain that the private school had encouraged them to enrol their daughter. They promised that once she had been admitted, the school management would consider a partial fee waiver, on account of the family’s relative poverty. In practice this didn’t happen, and indeed almost never happens. Having settled their child into the new school, parents think twice before moving them and disrupting their education, and therefore try hard to meet the (often increasing) fees.

It is clear from interviews with Dilshad’s mother that she sets limits on her daughter’s school progress, saying “she will make her study until 10<sup>th</sup> class. Not more than that.” Perhaps she is aware that her plans for Dilshad’s future may be in conflict with traditional expectations for early marriage: “*She will continue her studies; if she is studying properly then why should we get her married?*” When Dilshad does eventually marry, she will need to balance the benefits of her education with conventional domestic roles, living with her parents in law:

“[She]...should study and be able to do household work. Should be good at her in-laws place and keep the respect of the parents. Otherwise, they will blame us.”

### Early transitions and long-term expectations

Parents’ views of the future for Dilshad, Shanmuka priya and Revanth can be set in the context of the *Young Lives* sample survey data on caregivers’ views of children’s trajectory through the education system and beyond. Overall, poverty levels are strongly associated with expectations for children’s education. Amongst mothers in the poorest quintile, only 29.5% expected their child to achieve university education, while 40% expected them to finish school by grade 10. Conversely, 70.3% of the 5<sup>th</sup> quintile (least poor) caregivers anticipated university graduation for their child and only 11.8% expected them to finish school by grade 10.

However, these overall statistics disguise major differences in expectation according to whether



children's earliest educational experiences have been in the government or the private sector (Figures 4.7 and 4.8). For each poverty quintile, parents paying for private pre-school have much higher aspirations for their children, and poverty constraints appear to play a reduced role in shaping these aspirations.

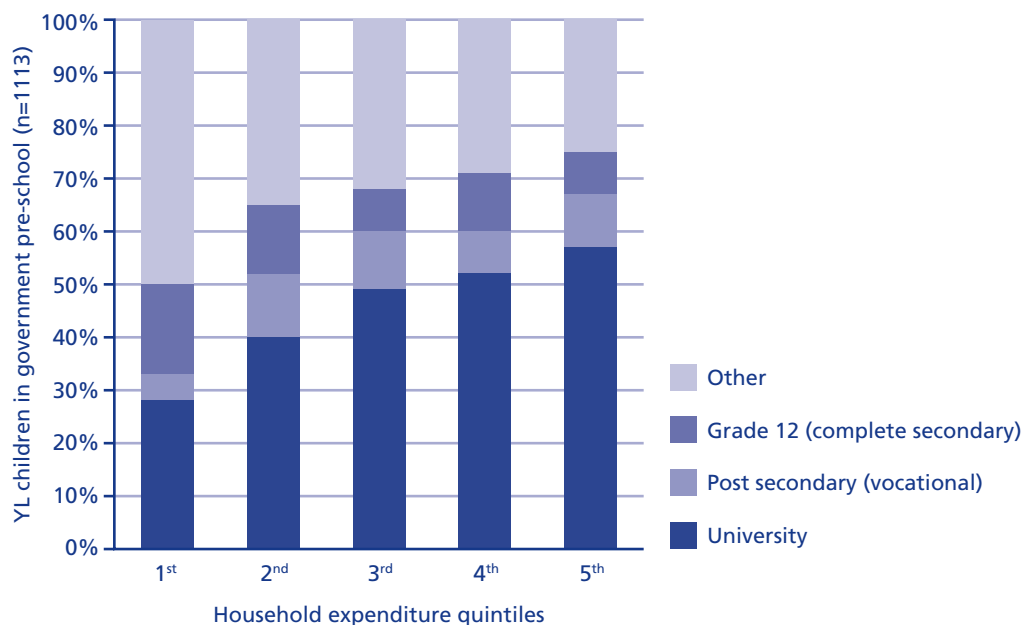
There are important differences between rural and urban caregivers' expectations concerning university education. Overall, 67% of urban parents expect their young children to attend university while only 48% of rural parents expect this to happen (the difference is statistically significant,  $p < 0.05$ ). *Young Lives* survey data also confirm that parental expectations are different for girls and boys, even if they are given similar opportunities during the earliest phases of schooling. For example, amongst the older cohort (aged 12 at survey), 64% of caregivers expect their son to attend university while 42% of girls' caregivers expect them to attend university. Interestingly, there is a generational difference here, in that girls have much higher aspirations for their future, with 54% hoping to attend university, compared with 68% of boys. These gender-based differences are most marked in rural areas, reinforcing the evidence for diverging gender pathways identified even during the pre-school years.

## Summary

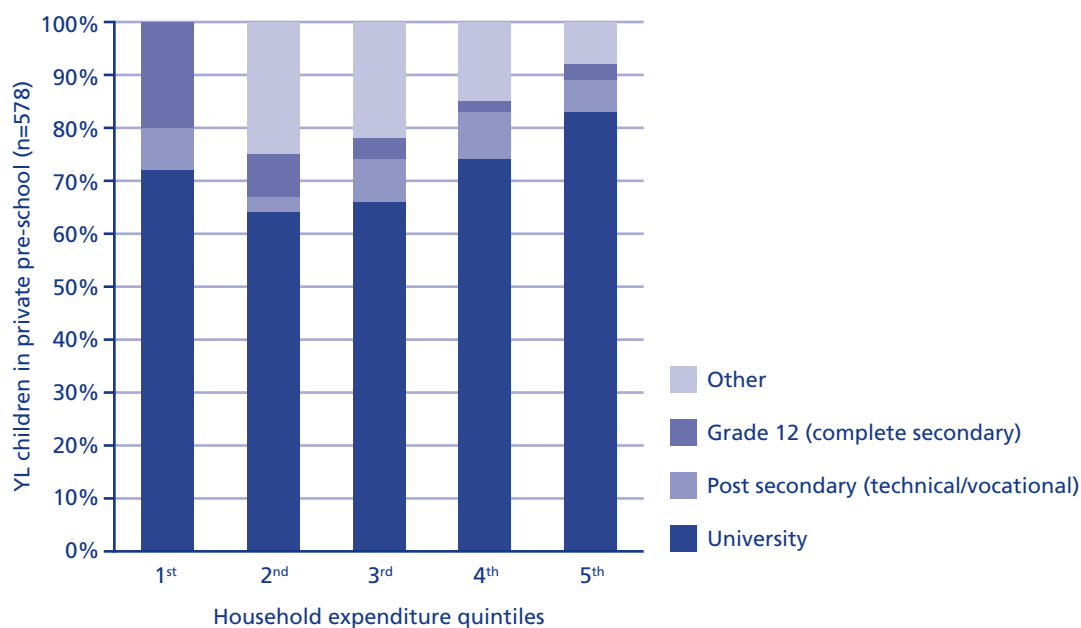
- Universal primary education is close to being achieved in India, (89% in 2005) but recent research has drawn attention to quality issues and achievement levels. Rapid growth in private education, including among the poorest families, adds to the complexity of provision.
- These issues are mirrored in Andhra Pradesh, where primary education enrolment is comparatively low (73% in 2006/7) and 36% of primary enrolments are in private schools according to official statistics.
- The attractions of private schools include perceived better quality and especially English-medium teaching. Caste or class also shapes parental choices, but costs are a burden on the poorest families and increase unpredictably, which can lead to disrupted educational experiences for children.
- India has a long history of ECCE, especially via the *anganwadi* network coordinated through ICDS. With impressive coverage but low resources, *anganwadis* have provided mainly healthcare and supplementary nutrition, and have been criticised for variable and inadequate quality and weakness in their education component.
- When their children were surveyed at 6 years old, 87% of *Young Lives* caregivers in Andhra Pradesh reported their children had attended pre-school at some point since the age of 3 years, with close to gender equity in both urban and rural sites.
- While government *anganwadis* are still the major providers, *Young Lives* evidence suggests caregivers have been increasingly seeking an alternative, by enrolling their children in the kindergartens of private schools. Use of government versus private early education is strongly differentiated according to poverty and according to where children live.
- In rural communities, government pre-schools are pro-poor, with around 80%



*Figure 4.7. Caregivers' expectations of educational achievements among children attending government pre-school by poverty levels – Andhra Pradesh*



*Figure 4.8. Caregivers' expectations of educational achievements among children attending private pre-school by poverty levels – Andhra Pradesh*



of the poorest children attending, and only around 60% of the more advantaged households. But a further 30% of these households with more resources are using private kindergartens, so overall there is still inequity in levels of access.

- The poorest households are also most likely to seek early enrolment for their children in the government primary school (54%) compared to less poor households (33%). The free midday meal scheme serves as a positive incentive to the poorest households.
- Private kindergartens are the dominant providers in urban areas, accounting for a higher percentage of children (than government provision) for all but the poorest 20% of the *Young Lives* sample, and a significant provider even for these extremely poor households.
- Private kindergartens are also found in rural communities, where gender impacts on the choice of private pre-school (13% girls, 18% boys) versus government *anganwadi* (73% girls, 68% boys). Gender differences in school choice are not evident from survey data amongst the urban sample at this stage.
- The trend towards private education is confirmed by quality ratings. Private education users rated the care and education received by their children much higher than government school users, across all poverty groups.
- Case studies illustrate the divergence of early educational trajectories between those using government versus private schools. Even the poorest parents try to find enough money to pay for education, even though many private schools are unregulated, the quality is variable and fees may be increased without warning.
- Poverty levels are strongly associated with expectations for children's education. The data show that 40% of the poorest households expect them to finish school by grade 10 and only 30% expect their child to achieve university education, whereas university education is expected for 70% of the least poor households in the sample. Educational expectations are higher for children in private education, irrespective of household poverty levels.
- While no gender differences are found in overall access to early education, choice of educational trajectory is linked to gender, with more boys than girls expected to follow a private trajectory. Gender inequities become more evident for older children, with 64% of caregivers expecting their 12-year-old boys to attend university, compared with only 42% of girls' caregivers. Girls themselves have higher aspirations for their future, with 54% hoping to attend university.



## Chapter 5: Towards ‘a positive agenda’ for early childhood

Is early childhood education living up to the many ambitious promises that have been made about its potential to enhance children’s lives and prospects? This key question was the starting point for this paper. More specifically, to what extent are ECCE services reaching the most disadvantaged or, at the very least, is there equity of access irrespective of economic status and other factors that impact on educational opportunities and outcomes? We also asked how parents viewed the relative quality of services in relation to their expectations for children’s long-term education. Finally, we examined the relationship between early childhood and primary school as this affects children’s transition experiences. The three countries studied for this research represent very different economic, political and cultural contexts, with quite different educational traditions and progress towards EFA goals. The analyses offered are specific to the countries discussed, and to the regions and communities within those countries. However, many of the findings from these specific country contexts can offer more general lessons for policy development, for research and for practice.

The case for implementing ECCE globally, especially as a pro-poor strategy, is well established, and the basic characteristics of effective programmes are well known. The global policy context is also clear, notably Goal 1 of the Dakar Framework for Action, which has been

reinforced by the call from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for comprehensive services, especially for the vulnerable and disadvantaged, as part of ‘a positive agenda’ for implementing the rights of every young child (General Comment 7, UN Committee, 2005). Large and growing numbers of children now access ECCE services in the countries being studied by *Young Lives*, and many positive individual stories could be told. Yet overall, the message of this report is that ECCE systems, as they are implemented now, may not be functioning effectively to promote developmental and educational potential, and to combat poverty and other inequalities. On the contrary, there is a worry that in some respects, the current state of early provision of care and education may be reinforcing or even fuelling inequalities. This somewhat depressing evidence from *Young Lives* research is consistent with conclusions from the *Global Monitoring Report 2009* (UNESCO 2008, p. 42).

In terms of reducing poverty and combating disadvantage or, at the very least, ensuring basic equity, the accounts of the previous chapters draw attention to progress but also highlight significant weaknesses in each of the three country contexts. The studies point to a need for better-resourced, more effectively regulated, higher quality education during the early years. Positive, innovative, pro-poor agendas are a policy priority, that recognise the early years

as a crucial phase of life and seek cost-effective solutions to improving access and quality. Strategies to improve access and quality must also be responsive to the situation and aspirations of children, families and communities. Earlier chapters of the report also draw attention to the failures of coordination between the early childhood sector and the early grades of primary school, which can add to children's and families' difficulties in making successful educational transitions.

## Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, widespread recognition of the value of education is expressed through official policies and rapid progress towards EFA goals. It is also signalled by *Young Lives* evidence of high parental aspirations for children completing secondary education and continuing on to university education. Not surprisingly, educational aspiration levels are differentiated according to poverty levels, rural versus urban locations, and according to children's gender. The perceived importance of education is a strong message from *Young Lives* group work with children, who saw "studying hard" and "doing well" in school as a criteria for children's "well-being", and missing school as contributing to "ill-being". Indeed, when the 12-year-old cohort were asked to rank the well-being criteria they had elicited through group work, education was second only to family in order of importance, coming before material security, good food and shelter (Camfield and Tafere 2009).

Yet the shortfall between aspirations for education and day-to-day school reality is typically

huge, especially where universal primary education is still being consolidated, classrooms are overcrowded, educational materials are in short supply, and teaching is of variable quality. Not surprisingly, for some (especially rural) children and families there may be doubts about following the schooling option at all, especially when parents struggle to pay hidden costs and children are faced with a continuing struggle to balance attending school with farm work, domestic chores and other contributions to family livelihoods. In this context, the role of ECCE is very marginal indeed. It plays virtually no place in the lives of children in rural communities, but it is gaining rapidly in significance in urban centres, in terms of numbers of pre-schools and the importance attached to securing a place, amongst high-aspiring families.

Early education in Ethiopia is almost entirely private. It is inequitably distributed, favouring those urban families able to buy a place for their child and assure them stronger first steps towards a more privileged educational trajectory. Countries such as Ethiopia face a major challenge in prioritising adequate resourcing of all sectors of education, when even basic primary school access and quality cannot yet be assured. Over the short term, the goal of equitable access to ECCE may seem unattainable, but the current situation favouring the most advantaged is equally unacceptable. Prioritising early childhood services targeted to the most disadvantaged is consistent with international policy priorities and with evidence from evaluation research, suggesting that interventions in the early years can yield substantial long-term benefits, including higher graduation rates and

fewer dropouts, amongst other things (AERA 2005). Access to good quality ECCE can improve children's readiness for school. Developing quality ECCE needs to be matched by improvements to the primary education sector to ensure schools are ready for children, in terms of infrastructure, staffing, materials and quality teaching and learning (Arnold et al. 2007).

## Peru

The situation in Peru is quite different. Government pre-schools are well established as the major provider, accounting for over 60% of *Young Lives* children across all poverty levels and offering a foundation for transition to virtually universal primary education. However, quality is still very variable and there are often additional hidden costs to families even when government provision is free. Access to government pre-schools is influenced heavily by where a child lives and by other factors over which children (and most often their families too) have no control, including poverty, gender and ethnicity, as well as disability and family circumstances, in each case disadvantaging those who might benefit most (Escobal et al. 2008). Generalisations about government ECCE are themselves misleading because the government of Peru supports several different types of pre-school, notably CEI and PRONOEI, which are managed and resourced differently, introducing further inequities in access and quality of provision. Finally, a significant and growing private early education sector is available to the more advantaged and is often recognised locally as conferring advantages to families seeking admission to better quality private primary schools.

Parents in Peru are keenly aware of the advantages of good schooling, which is linked to prospects for social and often physical mobility, especially migration from village to urban life. The theme of 'becoming someone in life' recurred in interviews with children and caregivers, who spoke of education as the main route out of poverty. For example, they spoke of being better able to defend themselves: "...because we can read and we don't get easily cheated"; the importance of becoming a professional: "they can't stay here...with a profession that takes her far..."; becoming different: "I walk in the fields in sandals... At least he will wear shoes..."; and escaping from rural labour: "I don't want to work in the fields...I want to finish my studies" (Crivello 2009). Most parents interviewed for qualitative research were concerned, not only about getting their young children into school, but also about the quality of education and the lack of continuity in children's transition experiences. However, due to scarce information and support, and the absence of a culture of communication and consultation, parents, children and their teachers seem to accept that these transitions are sometimes difficult and painful, without questioning how they might be improved (Ames et al. 2009).

*Young Lives* research in Peru also draws attention to the root of these difficult transition experiences in systemic divisions between early childhood and primary education sectors. Some major areas of discontinuity highlighted by the research include weak communication and coordination; differences in organisation and culture of classrooms, as well as in training between pre-school and primary school teach-

ers; and lack of preparation of and support to children and caregivers for their transition to primary school. In this respect, Peru is in a very similar situation to many countries with even longer traditions of early childhood and primary education, faced with the challenge of building partnerships between two sectors governed by different management structures, organisation and financing, professional training, curriculum and pedagogy. When multiple providers are responsible for education at both early childhood and primary education levels (national and local government, community organisations, NGOs, private providers, etc.), this simply adds to the complexity and makes children's and parents' transitions even more challenging. The temptation is to try to solve the problem by drawing the early childhood sector into line with primary schooling. The alternative is to seek a "strong and equal partnership" (OECD 2006).

### India (Andhra Pradesh)

Andhra Pradesh has provided an example of ECCE developing in ways that are different from both Ethiopia and Peru. The network of *anganwadi* early childhood centres is part of a long-established national system, coordinated within the ICDS programme. For 30 years this programme has been a focus for promoting early childhood development, especially basic healthcare and early nutrition. Indeed, the role of ICDS in community mobilisation towards ensuring adequate nutrition and basic health screening probably offers the most convincing justification for *anganwadis*, especially for the youngest children, whose growth is most at risk

(Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007). *Young Lives* evidence confirms that many parents, especially those from the poorest communities and rural sites where no other options are available, value the supplementary nutrition component of ICDS. The significance of food supplementation in schools, both as an incentive to attendance and a benefit to learning, has also been confirmed for older *Young Lives* children (Singh 2008). Yet, for increasing numbers of parents, it appears that health and nutrition goals are becoming less relevant, especially when delivered via low-resourced *anganwadis* of inconsistent quality.

As more and more households have sufficient resources to support children's basic health and nutrition, parents' goals for young children are being re-prioritised, with educational achievement at the top of the agenda and starting early in life. Disenchantment with the current service offered by *anganwadis* is confirmed by caregivers reporting low quality. At the same time, improvements in household income for many families in Andhra Pradesh is likely to mean they feel less reliant on this basic State support, except in the very poorest communities. For significant numbers of families, disenchantment about the educational value of *anganwadis* is matched by concern about the quality of teaching in government primary schools. Where parents feel they have a choice (in terms of sufficient financial resources and accessible private schools), they are increasingly exercising that choice, beginning during the pre-school years by enrolling their children in the kindergarten classes of private schools, even if this means lodging them in hostels or having them stay with relatives.

There is much to be said for the principle of offering choice to families. However, the consequence of current trends towards market-driven, relatively unregulated early childhood and primary education is recognised widely as amplifying rather than reducing inequalities (Kingdon 2007; Lewin 2007b; UNESCO 2008). The previous chapters have identified inequities between rural and urban sites as well as between poor and less poor families. The least poor families are self-evidently better able to make the choice to educate privately. Their choices may reinforce ethnic, caste or class divisions as well as economic divisions. Inequities within households have also been identified that are clearly linked to the costs of private education, in terms of hard decisions about which child will bring the biggest return on their investment in private education. Evidence for Andhra Pradesh confirms that boys are more likely to be selected than girls (who are traditionally seen as offering a lower return on educational investment since they will marry and move away to their husband's family). Also, first-born children are more likely to attend private school than their siblings.

Interviews with case study families revealed the continuing pressures faced by the poorest families, when they feel able to choose the private option. Fees take a significant proportion of income, even to buy into a 'low-fee' school, and sacrifices must often be made in other areas. In an unregulated environment, where private schools are driven by the profit motive, fees may rise without warning, putting families into debt or forcing them to move their child to another school, with disruption to the

child's learning and peer relations. In short, even when the poorest families are able to buy into a private option, they are at a disadvantage. These inequities are compounded most often by differences in quality between poorer private schools and richer private schools, linked to the variable fees that can be afforded by, for example, a rickshaw puller or shop assistant and a senior doctor or lawyer. In order to have a more genuine choice, parents would require financial support to cover the costs of private education for poor families as well as an accessible government school of at least equivalent quality, which currently seems unlikely.

Recognising the risk of socially divisive outcomes from parallel private and government education systems in India, the government has now introduced a 'Right to Education Bill'. This confirms that free and compulsory education is a fundamental right for all children between the ages of 6 and 14 years. It also requires that 25% of places in private schools are to be reserved for disadvantaged children from the neighbourhood, with the fees being reimbursed by government. It remains to be seen whether this radical step will endorse the key role for private schools rather than improving the quality and effectiveness of government schools, and of course it does not yet extend to early childhood education.

## Conclusions

Despite rapid growth of the sector, and many individual positive experiences, current arrangements for early childhood care and education in these three countries appear to fall



short of the requirements for implementing the rights of every child, and are equally incompatible with achieving social equity. While some services have been targeted to disadvantaged children, the better resourced, higher quality services appear to be more often accessed by relatively more advantaged families. This trend runs counter to Dakar Goal 1, which asserts the priority that should be attached to services for “the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children”. Overall, the research described here points to significant shortcomings in the realisation of scientifically grounded claims made for the power of early childhood services to support greater social equity, and as a cost-effective investment in human capital with potential to bring high rates of return.

This conclusion should not be interpreted as a counsel of despair, nor as undermining the case for investment in early childhood services. It should be seen as a challenge: to strengthen the provision of high quality early childhood programmes and ensure all children make successful transitions into primary education. Governments, international donors and other agencies have a central role to play in bridging the huge gulf that currently exists between promises made for early childhood programmes and the everyday realities for children and families. Elements of a positive agenda for early childhood would include strengthening the policy framework for ECCE, with clear goals, set implementation timeline and strong monitoring procedures. The priority is to widen opportunities for very poor families, marginalised groups and children in special cir-

cumstances (including orphans, children with disabilities and other vulnerable groups).

Improving the status and professional skills of early childhood workers is another high priority as well as strengthening curricula and pedagogy. While much can be achieved at relatively low cost, severe resource constraints are a major obstacle, and ECCE can be seen as diverting precious resources away from reforms needed to strengthen basic education. It is essential to look for innovative and cost-effective solutions, which include building on existing infrastructures and services, and seeking opportunities to support community initiatives and collaborative partnerships. For two of the countries in this research, there is an obvious starting point for a positive agenda. The community-based PRONOEI programme in Peru and the ICDS *anganwadis* in India are countrywide, context-specific initiatives designed to reach the most vulnerable populations. Rejuvenating these programmes, reviewing their priorities and strengthening quality could become a high priority.

Several general lessons emerge from *Young Lives* research, introduced in this report:

### ***Ensuring quality in early education***

Early childhood education is playing a major (and increasing) role in shaping many children’s lives and their futures, including in countries where primary education systems are still being consolidated. But early education services are often of very variable quality, as are the school classrooms to which children progress.

It is questionable whether simply extending the number of years children spend in low quality, often overcrowded, badly equipped classrooms is in their best interests, especially when their teachers are poorly trained, underpaid, and absent, and children complain of being beaten. It is equally questionable whether traditional models for schooling are either appropriate or sustainable when extended into the early years.

### ***Better coordinated early education and care systems***

Even in countries with well developed early education services, transition experiences into first grade are frequently stressful for children and parents because of a lack of communication and coordination between two sectors that are governed by different management structures, organisation and financing, professional training, curriculum and pedagogy. Uncoordinated education systems are a major problem, but arguably weakly governed, under resourced systems are even more of a problem, especially in ensuring equity and quality. Development of ECCE must be coordinated with reforms to primary education in ways that enhance both sectors and ensure children make successful educational transitions. Coordination between pre-school and primary education has been a major ECCE theme amongst the world's richest countries over many decades. Addressing these issues is now a global challenge.

### ***Focussing on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children***

Current arrangements for early childhood care and education appear in many cases to run

counter to the requirements for implementing the rights of every child, and are equally incompatible with achieving social equity. While some government services are explicitly intended to be pro-poor, they do not function effectively to achieve that goal in practice for too many children. Moreover, trends towards decentralisation have often been linked to encouragement (or at least passive acceptance) of a large private sector, but without adequate regulation in many cases. The consequence of current trends seems likely to reinforce or even amplify rather than reduce inequities, notably between rural and urban sites, and between the poor and less poor families. They also run directly counter to Goal 1 set out in the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All, which asserts the priority that should be attached to ECCE services for "the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children". In order to reverse these trends, governments along with international donors and other agencies have a central role to play. Their challenge is to respond effectively to parent and community educational aspirations for quality ECCE, which are endorsed by the global EFA agenda.

### ***More effective governance, including of the private sector***

The three country case studies in this report offer contrasting examples of the challenges of equity and quality for early childhood and for primary education, especially in contexts where the private sector is a major provider. In Ethiopia, the private sector has filled the vacuum of demand in the absence of significant government initiatives, and inevitably functions to benefit the most advantaged urban groups.

Both Peru and Andhra Pradesh have well-established government systems, which have grown up in part as pro-poor strategies designed to improve children's health and development. But these government services are now overlaid by a growing private sector, not least where parents feel dissatisfied with the quality of existing government services. The situation in urban Andhra Pradesh is extreme, with largely unregulated private providers dominating and displacing traditional *anganwadis* as the pre-school of choice for parents.

#### ***Addressing the full range of equity issues***

Other equity issues are also at stake, in that early education opportunities and parental choices often reinforce ethnic, caste or class divisions. Inequities within households have also been identified, as families make choices about which child to educate privately and which to send to the government school. In such situations, boys are more likely to benefit than girls and more able children are more likely to benefit than less able children. Private education places particular pressures on the poorest families and children, in terms of sacrifices in other areas of expenditure. Unregulated ECCE can amplify rather than reduce inequalities. In an unregulated environment, school fees may rise without warning, putting families into debt or forcing them to move their child to another school, with consequent disruption to their learning and peer relations. The poorest families are at an inevitable disadvantage over better-off parents, and these disadvantages are often compounded by differences in quality between poor schools and rich

schools, especially in the private sector. Finally, effective ECCE initiatives cannot be planned in a vacuum. They should be integrated with national poverty alleviation strategies in general, and with sectoral policies in education, health and welfare in particular.

Many of the challenges for ECCE highlighted in this report are part of a much wider crisis of educational governance re-emphasised by UNESCO in *The Global Monitoring Report 2009*. These are the equity and quality issues that threaten to undermine the potential of early childhood education, the divisiveness of encouraging unregulated private schools while failing to improve government education systems, and the importance of viewing governance within a comprehensive framework that accommodates all sectors and age groups. The report's recommendations include building a positive equity agenda, setting clear policy objectives, recognising the link between educational and wider social and economic reforms, raising quality standards, building the skills and motivation of teachers, recognising the incompatibility of equity goals within a market-led private system, strengthening the financial base, eliminating corruption, and building partnerships with civil society (UNESCO 2008).

It is therefore appropriate to conclude by acknowledging that the specific focus of this report on ECCE is only one element in the comprehensive governance framework that is required to eliminate current inequities and help break down the cycle of poverty. Of course, for young children and families these

earliest educational transitions are among the most crucial they will encounter in their pathway through education and beyond. It is important to qualify the conclusions of this report, which may seem somewhat depressing, by reaffirming that many hundreds of thousands of children worldwide now benefit from quality ECCE during the years before school.

Numerous high-quality programmes, curricula and pedagogies can be found, delivered by highly committed early years professionals. Yet overall, the message on equity, quality and successful transitions is inescapable. There is much work still to be done if the promises made for early childhood are to be fully realised for all the world's children.



## Appendix: Brief summary of data collection methods

### **Young Lives Round 2 core questionnaires**

The first source of data is large sample surveys carried out by *Young Lives* teams in the four countries in 2006/7. The main source of data was a household survey with caregivers of the younger cohort. Supplementary data came from interviews with older cohort children and a community questionnaire. The household and child questionnaires were translated into the three main languages (Amharic, Oromiffa and Tigrigna) in Ethiopia; into Telugu and English in India; and into Spanish and Quechua in Peru. Back translation was carried out to ensure

the accuracy and consistency of the questionnaires. All the questionnaires were translated from English into the local languages, and then back to English to ensure that the right question was being asked and that the core questions were comparable across countries.

The summary boxes below illustrate the range of topics covered by sections of the *Young Lives* questionnaires, and include specific examples of some of the key questions most relevant to this report (in bold print). The full text of all survey instruments used by *Young Lives* at each round can be viewed at [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)

#### **Household questionnaire**

- Section 1 Parental background
  - 1a Parental background
- Section 2 Household education
- Section 3 Livelihoods and asset framework
  - 3a Land and crop agriculture
  - 3b Time allocation of adults and children
  - 3c Productive assets
  - 3d Income from agricultural and non-agricultural activities
  - 3e Transfers, remittances and debts
- Section 4 Household food and non-food consumption and expenditure
  - 4a Expenditures on foods bought, supplied from own sources
  - 4b Other expenditures – non-food items
  - 4c Food security
- Section 5 Social capital
  - 5a Support networks

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- > 5b Family, group and political capital
- 5c Collective action and exclusion
- 5d Information networks
- Section 6 Economic changes and recent life history
- Section 7 Socio-economic status
- Section 8 Childcare, education and activities**
  - Pre-school*
    - Since the age of 36 months, has NAME regularly attended a (formal/informal) pre-school?
    - How old was NAME when he/she first went to pre-school?
    - How long did NAME attend pre-school for?
    - Who runs this pre-school? (e.g. private, church, NGO, public/government)
    - Do/did you have to pay money or in kind for NAME to be able to attend?
    - In your opinion, how good is the quality of the care and teaching at this pre-school?
    - What were the main reasons why NAME attended a pre-school?
    - If NAME has never attended a pre-school, what are the main reasons for this?
    - Has NAME begun formal school (i.e. formal primary/first grade)?
    - At what age did NAME start formal school?
    - If NAME has not yet begun formal school (i.e. formal primary/first grade), at what age do you expect NAME to begin school?
- Section 9 Child health
- Section 10 Anthropometry
- Section 11 Caregiver perceptions and attitudes**
  - 11a General**
    - Do you think that formal schooling has been (or would have been) useful in your life?
    - When NAME is about 20 years old, what job do you think s/he will be doing?
    - Ideally what level of formal education would you like NAME to complete?
    - Do you expect NAME will reach that level of education?
    - What are main reasons NAME is most likely to drop out of school early?
  - 11b Maternal health
  - 11c Child perceptions about own development

### Child questionnaire (older cohort only)

#### Section 1 School and activities

##### 1a Child's schooling

- Have you ever attended formal school? (not pre-school)
- Are you currently enrolled in school?
- What type of school are you attending? (e.g. private, church, NGO, public/government)
- Which grade/class are you in now?
- When travelling to school do you feel you are in danger?
- What are the best things about being at school?
- What are the worst things about being at school?

##### 1b Child's time use

#### Section 2 Child health

#### Section 3 Social networks, social skills and social support

#### Section 4 Feelings and attitudes

#### Section 5 Parents and household issues

#### Section 6 Perceptions of future, community environment and household wealth

- Do you think that formal schooling will be/would have been useful in your future life?
- When you are about 20 years old, what job do you think you will be doing?
- Imagine you had no constraints and could stay at school as long as you liked, what level of formal education would you like to complete?
- Given your current situation do you expect you will reach that level of education?
- What are main reasons you are most likely to drop out of school early?

#### Section 7 Child development

### Community questionnaire

#### Module 1 General module

#### Section 1 General community characteristics

#### Section 2 Social environment

#### Section 3 Access to services

#### Section 4 Economy

#### Section 5 Local Prices

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*Module 2* *Child-specific module***Section 1** **Educational services (general)****Section 2** **Child day care services****Section 3** **Educational services (pre-school, primary, secondary)**

Section 4 Health services

Section 5 Child protection services

## Qualitative data collection methods

A second source of data in this research is in-depth individual and group-based work with a sub-sample, children and families, supplemented by observations. Below are listed the main components of qualitative research with younger cohort children and adults during data collection in 2007. Further details can be found at [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)

### *Children*

- Individual interviews
- Group activities
  - School transitions
  - Identifying what counts as well-being
  - Body mapping
  - Community mapping

- Child-led tour
- Life course draw-and-tell
- Who is important?
- Daily lives
- Photo-elicitation

### *Adults*

- Individual caregiver interviews
- Collective caregiver interviews
- Community collective interviews
- Teacher, individual interview
- Teacher, collective interview

### *Observations*

- Home observations
- School/classroom observations
- Community observations

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This working paper is part of a series on early transitions from Young Lives, a 15-year longitudinal study of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. Further information about Young Lives research is available on the website: [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)

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